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BLACK KEY
by M. SCOTT MICHEL
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It is a fact, of course, that the dead can't speak. But sometimes they can make signs. . . .

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He had ample reason to feel bitter toward the law. Should that be enough to make him turn criminal?

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Front cover painting by Stan Biernacki illustrating a scene from "The Black Key."

MAMMOTH MYSTERY OCTOBER 1946

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Volume 2 Number 5

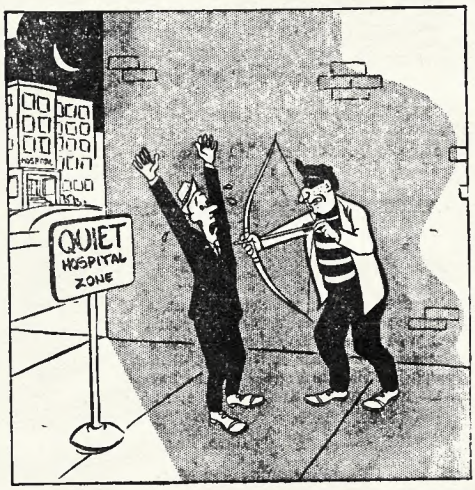
THE CALL BOX

REPORT BY THE EDITOR

NOW that you readers have put your seal of approval on "The Cuckoo Clock," Milton Ozaki's fine novel in the previous issue of MAMMOTH MYSTERY, we have some good news for you. The second Ozaki novel is written and in our possession and, we think, will he featured in these pages before many more moons have passed. And confidentially, the second one is much better than his first!

BUT enough of the past and the future; let's do a little gum-beating over the complete novel that leads off the Octoher issue. Once again we give you a complete hook-length novel—and give it to you months *ahead* of its appearance in the two dollar format. This time we've made it a psychological murder novel—the type of story that is so popular these days. M. Scott Michel, who wrote "The Black Key," is eminently qualified to do this type of yarn, as is evidenced by the quality of his previous novel, "The Psychiatric Murders," which Mystery House hrought out earlier this year. So, now that you know something of the hackground of "The Black Key," get your shoes off, a tall, frosty glass at your elhow, the hassock in front of the lounge chair, and settle back for two hours of enjoyable reading!

IF YOU looked over the contents pages before you turned to The Call Box, you've prohahly heat us to the punch hy already reading "Creature of Hahit," hy William P. McGivern. We've learned hy experience that Bill has that effect on a good many thousands of readers. Here is another yarn, told in this author's usual fast, crisp style . . . and with a puzzle to it that will haffle you completely. Briefly: the police saw this woman walk into the house, knew it was impossihle that she could have left it after killing her victim . . . and yet she just wasn't there! How is that possihle? Well, the story starts on page 70.



PHILLIP SHARP, radio gag-man and the Beau Brummel of the literary field, comes up with another one of his excellent stories in "Welcome Home, Killer." This is ahout a man who left his home town because he and the cops didn't always see eye to eye ahout some matters. But one day he hecame homesick and returned for a visit. Naturally, he gets all tangled up in a lot of trouhle; otherwise Mr. Sharp wouldn't have had a story to tell.

ONE of your favorite fictional characters is hack again. You met him in "Passage to Beirut" for the first time; again in "Roulette and Old Lace," and now he's hack again in "Uncle Takes a Hand." His name is Uncle Shpinay, Syrian linen salesman, and a smarter old gentleman you wouldn't want to meet. In fact, there are times his nephew hates having him around, but Uncle Shpinay always manages to regain a place in his affections.

ANOTHER of Chester S. Geier's smoothly written, finely characterized short stories appears this month. In it you'll meet a man who found himself on the verge of losing everything he had spent years accumulating, and his life on top of that. It was a spot that required fast thinking to overcome; hut he wasn't sure he could think that fast. "The Murdered are Mute" will tell you whether the man succeeded.

FINE stories by Ken Kessler and John D. MacDonald—the latter a newcomer who shows a world of promise—wind up this issue. You won't want to miss either of them. . . . Next issue, comes a fine short novel by William P. McGivern. It is the story of a quiet, inoffensive man who had a fight with his wife one evening and went out to sow a wild oat to get "even". . . . —*H. B.*

THOUGHTS HAVE WINGS

You Can Influence Others With Your Thinking!

TRY IT SOME TIME. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a positive demonstration that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of your success and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

Demonstrable Facts

How many times have you wished there were some way you could impress another favorably—*get across to him or her your ideas*? That thoughts can be transmitted, received, and understood by others is now scientifically demonstrable. The tales of miraculous accomplishments of mind by the ancients are now known to be fact—not fable. The method whereby these things can be *intentionally*, not accidentally, accomplished has been a secret long cherished by the Rosicrucians—one of the schools of ancient wisdom existing throughout the world. To thousands everywhere, for centuries, the Rosicrucians have privately taught this nearly-lost art of the practical use of mind power.

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THE BLACK KEY

By M. SCOTT MICHEL

ALEXANDER CORNELL couldn't sleep, that Monday night in July. A poor sleeper under any conditions, he turned and sighed, lying in his own sweat while the heat clawed at him with muggy, oppressive fingers. Manhattan lay immobile, yielding to the sixteen day heat wave, protesting passively with moist handkerchiefs, iced drinks, electric fans and cooling systems. Cornell protested without availing himself of any of these advantages.

In the distance came the faint roll of thunder, and Cornell felt consoled that perhaps a storm was brewing, and for a moment his eyelids drooped and a sleepiness came over him.

The bell rang. A short, hesitant ring and Cornell sat up, wondering. The bell rang again. He slipped out of bed and into a silk robe and consulted his watch. It was twenty minutes after midnight. He walked from the bedroom, through the apartment and opened the front door.

Angelic. That was the word that ran through Cornell's mind to describe her over-all appearance. She stood there looking directly into his eyes, a small girl—no, a woman, nearing thirty—under five feet and not more than a hundred pounds in weight he was sure. Honey blonde hair framed an oval face, came to a sharp widow's peak over her high forehead, dropped to her shoulders. She wore a simple white dress and her skin was delicately white, untouched by the sun. Her eyes, light gray eyes that glinted with flecks of silver, regarded him with confidence. He was puzzled that she seemed fresh and unmindful of the heat.

"Dr. Cornell?" she asked in a thin, soprano voice.

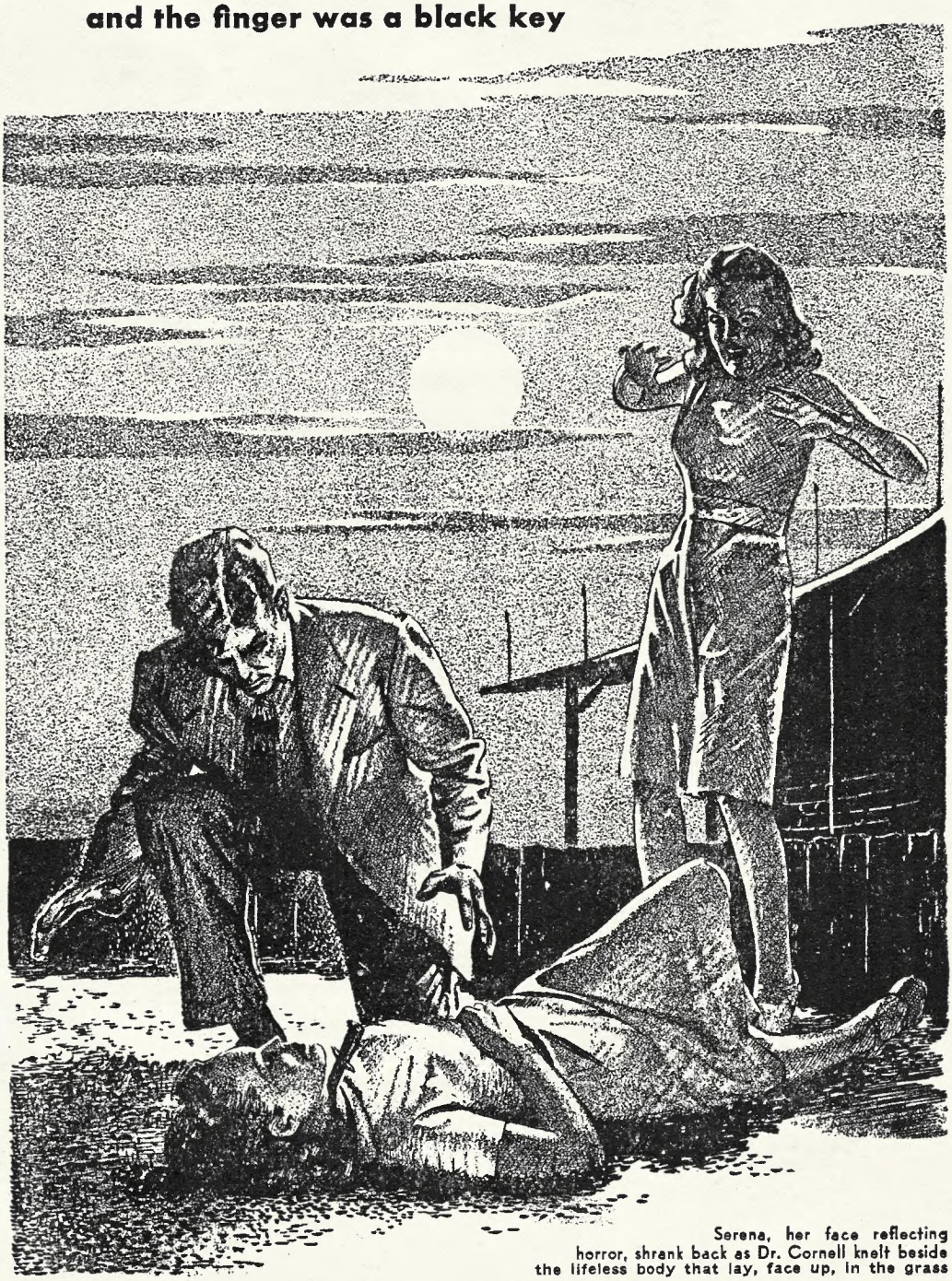
Cornell nodded his head.

"May I come in? It's a matter of extreme urgency." She had a clipped English accent and her speech came rapidly, bubbly.

"Well . . . it's pretty late," Cornell said, frowning.

"I know it is, sir. But this can't wait. I passed and saw your sign. I need a psychiatrist so *very* badly . . ." Her voice broke for a brief instant. ". . . I need someone to help me find out *if* I killed a girl."

Her mind knew only the vision of an ugly man who pointed an accusing finger at her . . . and the finger was a black key



Serena, her face reflecting horror, shrank back as Dr. Cornell knelt beside the lifeless body that lay, face up, in the grass

Cornell didn't answer, but held the door open for her, then turned and led her past the parlor, or waiting room, along a narrow hallway and into his consultation room. A door from this room led to the bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom.

But it was the consultation room only that bore any sign of character. It was furnished with numerous rare antique pieces; Chinese chippendale chairs, Adam side tables, an inlaid Spanish cabinet, all authentic. The desk was a large mahogany affair, American made. Also American made was the huge stuffed mohair chair directly in front of the desk, and the specially built couch in the corner. It was a comforting, wholesome room.

Cornell turned on the lights and the girl sank into the large chair and Cornell sat down behind his desk. He made no apologies for his appearance.

He focused his attention upon the pearl earings she was wearing and said nothing to promote the conversation. He felt ill at ease, having her in his apartment at this hour. A straight-laced psychiatrist, Alexander Cornell had found the life of a bachelor compatible with his sense of values—and he conformed rigidly to the conventions society imposed upon such behavior, because he agreed with the impositions.

"I was born a half hour ago," the girl said with a simplicity that halted any humorous remark he might have felt inclined to provide.

It was too hot. It was too late. The thunder was sounding louder now. He wanted to get back to bed, even though he knew he wouldn't be able to sleep.

"What is your name, Miss?" he said formally.

She looked at him. "Name?" She gave a tiny laugh. "I guess . . . Smith will do," and she emphasized this with a shrug.

CORNELL brushed the hair off his forehead with the back of his hand. He was forty-three years of age, of medium height, slender and wiry-looking. He had a round, boyish face, dark eyes, and tannette hair, gray at the temples, that fell into unruly curls, one batch invariably drooping over his forehead, which he as invariably pushed away.

She repeated, "I was born a half hour ago, in an empty playground near the East River. I became aware I was standing there. I had come there out of a mental darkness. Oh, how shall I explain it . . .?" She stopped and giggled in her tinkly voice, then looked embarrassed. "I'm sorry. Forgive me. It's dreadful not to know who you are. It's so tragic it becomes humorous."

Cornell nodded at her, and he felt the skin in back of his head tighten. *What game are you playing?* he thought to himself.

He said, aloud, "What about not knowing whether or not you killed a girl?"

"When I came to life in that playground, I was standing over the body of a girl—a very pretty girl. She had . . . had a knife in her n-neck." Her eyelids closed, tightened, then opened and she looked at him, waiting.

"Go on," said Cornell. There was a hardness in her eyes that did not fit her overall appearance, he noted.

"Don't you believe me?" her voice became bubbly again, and she had to clear her throat. "Don't you believe I . . . I . . . *can't* remember who I am . . . or anything of my past?"

"Do you know the dead girl?"

"No sir."

"Then how did *you* get there?" he snapped. This wasn't right. He didn't like her sitting there at this hour of the night. He didn't like what she was saying. He didn't want *any* thing to change the set routine of his life—which

a pretty, angelic-looking blonde might very well do. She aroused the protective instinct in a man.

"I don't know. I'm telling you, sir, *I don't know.* Please, you must believe what I say." She had leaned forward in her seat, her white arms held out to him, her eyes screwed into an expression of self-sympathy.

"Thing is, what *are* you saying?" His voice, low and mild had a penetrating quality, which he was aware of and which he practiced.

She looked puzzled and hurt at that. Her voice took on a slight wail. "Why are you doing this to me, Dr. Cornell? Why are you making me feel so terrible? I've come to you for help, not condemnation." Deep lines creased her wide forehead.

Only his dark eyes, standing out in match with his tan hair, smiled at her. He pushed the cowlick off his forehead and made a sucking noise with his tongue and teeth.

"All right," he said, "you were born standing over the body of another girl. What did you do then?"

"I walked away. I knew I was in Manhattan. I knew which way the streets ran. *What* I was doing in Manhattan I didn't know. I had only forgotten my identity and everything about my past life . . . I began wondering if I had killed the girl, but I felt no fear, no anxiety." Her English accent was heavier now.

"That's no criterion, your feelings," said Cornell.

"I don't know," she said wearily. "I don't know anything at all. I only feel as though I'm reliving something I've gone through before."

"Point is," said Cornell, slowly, "just what did you expect *me* to do?"

"I'm . . . not sure. I rather hoped . . ."

"What?"

"Well, sir. I had made up my mind to go to the police. To tell them. Then I couldn't. It wouldn't be fair, not fair at all. I would have no chance to defend myself because I knew nothing about myself or what had happened. Then I saw your sign on the building. Haven't you any suggestions, sir?"

Cornell was reasonably certain that the girl was suffering from hysteria amnesia. Her mind, having been subjected to some extreme unpleasantness (as a guess, either having killed the other girl or having seen the person who did) had repressed her identity from her. And now it wasn't allowing her enough elasticity to combat it. Her attitude reminded him of the weather outside: the lull before the storm.

She sat there, looking at him, a look of anxiety on her white face.

He said: "Suppose I dress and go with you and you show *me* the girl with the knife in her throat?"

"Oh thank you, thank you," she cried and jumped up.

OUTSIDE, they walked together, not talking, but Cornell aware, as though by some remote magnetism, of this small, slender girl next to him. She led him eastward, all the way over to a playground between East River Drive and York Avenue, and there she showed him the body of the girl lying in the uncut grass of the outfield of the baseball diamond.

Black hair, pretty, about thirty-two or -three, her face calm and at rest, as faces in death usually are. The knife had an alligator-skin handle, and the portion of the blade that showed was gold or copper. She wore a pink chambray dress with black lines running diagonally across it, in rows.

The thunder was louder and there were occasional flashes of lightning. The air was like a soaked sponge, almost ready to be squeezed out. At the

other end of the playground, the swings hung motionless. The monkey crossbars gleamed in the moonlight like some grotesque trap wrought by a mad brain. Everything seemed to be hanging in suspended animation.

The thunder boomed and Cornell shivered, impatient to get back to his office. Somehow, he didn't like the idea of this pretty, black-haired woman having to lie here when it began to rain.

They didn't speak about it going back to Cornell's apartment-office, and not until they arrived there and had gone in and Miss Smith had again taken the seat before the desk, did Cornell speak to her.

"There are two things you ought to know," he told her taking off his jacket and throwing it carelessly on a chair.

She sat there, waiting, no expression showing on her oval-shaped face.

"First, the police have to be informed of the murder. Please understand that, Miss Smith. Secondly, when you picked a psychiatrist, you happened to pick one who is a special adviser to the District Attorney, functioning in his Bureau Of Psychiatry and Legal Medicine."

"My God!" She held her temples with her fingers, staring at him, shaking her head as the implication became clear.

"However," Cornell went on, "this murder belongs to the Homicide Squad and I do not enter into it unless requested specifically by the District Attorney. I am *not* the medical assistant, who is the head of the Bureau of Psychiatry and Legal Medicine and who is a doctor and a lawyer and a civil service appointee."

She looked at him squarely, a little wisp of a woman, her chin thrust forward defiantly in her fight for survival. Cornell turned away to avoid seeing those glints of silver in her eyes which made his stomach tighten with uncertainty.

"You know what will happen to me, don't you, sir? But of course. *You* must know it very well. I was with her. I was the *only* one. My innocence wouldn't matter to them because I cannot prove I did *not* kill her . . . They'll s-send me to Bellevue f-for examination."

"The police will be fair with you, Miss Smith. They'll help you." Even as he spoke he realized he was trying to convince himself more than the girl. Regular police routine, not set up to cope with modern psychology, would only push her into a more serious mental condition. Deny it as the police might, he'd seen it happen many times.

"I *have* to inform Homicide, Miss Smith," Cornell added sternly, hoping he was being impressive enough.

"Then don't tell about me. *Hide me!*"

"What!" He spun around to face her. Stunned, he tried to break the paralysis gripping his tongue. He finally managed to sputter, "You *are* an audacious cuss!" He stared at her. "By George, and you mean it, too."

She stood up and faced him, the top of her head barely reaching his chin.

"A-are you married?" she asked, cautiously.

"No, but that . . ."

"Then please, *please* . . . let me stay here with you. Help me, Dr. Cornell . . . Help me clear up this amnesia. I won't be any trouble to you. And I promise, I *promise* that if I'm guilty I will never reveal where I've been and will go to the police with a full confession."

Cornell tried to grip himself.

"Stop it. You don't know what you're talking about," he snapped at her. He walked away from her, sat down in the swivel chair behind his desk. He didn't

want to look at her, to see the roundness of her body, the whiteness of her skin, the expression of weariness on her face—or the hardness of the silver specks in her eyes. His hands gripped the edges of the desk till the knuckles bulged.

A surge of determination swept through him and he sat up straight.

"No!" he said with finality. "By George, absolutely no! I'd have to be crazy. I'd be obstructing justice, endangering my career, my work. I couldn't even think of risking it . . . Now, please, Miss Smith. Have a seat while I report the murder to Homicide."

He lifted the receiver and dialed. He was sure of himself now. He was in control of his emotions and his decisions.

He felt much better.

CORNELL tried to sleep. The thunder continued to rumble, sometimes louder, sometimes more softly; never with any firmness. But no storm, no rain, no breeze. Just hot, muggy air sucking at him tenaciously. Miss Smith kept crowding into his mind, pushing away all efforts at sleep.

About three o'clock he began to doze. Then he thought he was dreaming that somebody was crying in his ear and he awoke. The crying was real enough and was coming from the bedroom.

It was four fifteen.

He got up from the couch, turned on the small lamp, walked to the door of the bedroom and listened. Miss Smith was sobbing, choking sobs. He had yielded to her in the face of his determination not to. He had permitted her to stay here in his apartment.

". . . at least," he had told her, "for the night, until I can decide tomorrow what to do with you."

He walked into the bedroom.

She was sitting up in bed, the light on, her knees drawn up against her chest, her arms crossed over them, her face buried in her arms. She looked swamped in the blue-striped pajamas he had lent her for the night.

"*Now* what is it?" he said and he was irritable.

She glanced up at him, her eyes red.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Cornell," she sniffed. "I didn't mean to awaken you." She wiped her eyes with the sleeves of the pajamas and straightened her legs.

"Since you did, explain it."

"I had a dream. A bad dream and it frightened me. I-I'm sorry, sir."

"Do you remember it?"

She nodded. "Forgive me, I'll go back to sleep and not bother you again."

"Wait," said Cornell. He was wide awake now. Filled with a new enthusiasm, he hurried from the room and was back in several moments with a pencil and a small notebook.

"Now, Miss Smith," he said, sitting down on the edge of the bed, "tell me your dream. All you can remember. Lie back and relax."

She lay back and folded her hands under her head and closed her eyes.

"I saw a girl and blood was streaming from all the pores of her body. Then suddenly the blood turned to hair. Beautiful red hair down to her ankles. Then a man came in and he was so horribly ugly I couldn't look at him. I was terrified. I tried to turn away but I could still see him through the mirror. He was shaking a warning finger at me and then I noticed that the finger was a *black key* . . ." She stopped and remained silent.

Cornell wrote hastily in his small notebook and when he finished he looked up at her. "Is that all?"

"Much more. I'm trying to remember it exactly."

"Never mind that, just tell me, as

it comes to you.

"I saw an airplane in the distance and the pilot of the plane was chasing the girl who was bleeding. Then I noticed I was holding a bouquet of flowers. I blew on them and they wilted. I took the flowers and put them in a small coffin and a man wearing thick glasses came and took them out and it turned into a small child."

"Go on," said Cornell.

"The rest is somewhat hazier to remember. There was a long queue of women carrying small coffins and the man with the heavy glasses took a bouquet of flowers out of each coffin. Then I think the girl who was bleeding brought her coffin to him and he became enraged and told her to stop bleeding."

Only the sound of Cornell's pencil scratching across the paper could be heard. The girl's face tightened across the forehead.

"I remember," she said, "being up in the clouds where I met my prince charming. His face was sort of hypnotized and like a red drum, which he was beating with his fist. Then suddenly I saw a man with a mustache and a beard, dressed in a black robe, and he was angry at me. He chased me out of his house and I remember that the girl with the long red hair went along with me . . . I can't remember any more."

Cornell finished his notes, then looked at her and sighed. "Let's both try and get some sleep now," he said.

He stood up and walked out without saying anything more to her.

CHAPTER III

THE desired storm never materialized and on Tuesday morning Manhattan prepared itself again for the continuing onslaught of the heat. Cornell awoke, more tired than rested, went into the bathroom, shaved, showered and dressed. He left his pajamas hanging over the towel rack.

When he came out he was about to knock on the bedroom door when the odor of frying bacon wafted under his nose. He traced it into the kitchen.

Miss Smith, dressed as she was last night, but minus her pearl earrings, smiled at him as he came in, and Cornell felt his cheeks get warm. This was new experience for him, a woman in his kitchen, and if he showed no outward concern, his inner reaction was one of embarrassment. Alexander Cornell did not fit the popular conception of the psychiatrist who was supposed to be uninhibited, unrepressed, damning society and convention and trying to do—and teaching their parents to do —as they pleased.

On the contrary, during his courses of study, the more Cornell was made aware of the primitive drives toward pleasure that stew around in every person's subconscious mind, the more he had conformed to the set rules of society. It was enough to be aware of one's instincts and aims, he reasoned to himself, catering to them at opportune times. It was far from necessary to go around beating your breast with an outward display of Bohemianism.

Miss Smith was talking.

"I did the best with what you had on hand," she said. "Sit down, won't you?"

He sat down at the kitchen table. "This a surprise. I've always wondered what it would be like to have a woman around, doing the cooking."

"Haven't you *ever* had a woman here before?" Her eyes scanned his face, knowingly, her lips set teasingly.

"Truth is, I haven't. Not that you will believe it though," Cornell explained, aware that he *was* offering an explanation. "I was born and raised in Boston, in that peculiar level of so-

ciety which abhors any deviation from the rules handed down by our ancestors. Oddly enough, I never had the desire to break those rules."

Miss Smith gave her head a little shake and the honey blonde hair jumped with the motion. Cornell observed it and he was alarmed because he liked it.

She set the platter of bacon and scrambled eggs on the table, poured the coffee and sat down opposite him.

"You are a strange person for a psychiatrist," she said.

"I know," said Cornell, eating. "I'm considered a rarity—an oddity, I should say—in the profession because I believe the unconscious mind can be integrated with the society-controlled conscious mind. I believe in compromise, not flagrant defiance."

THEY ate in silence and when they had finished and were smoking with the coffee, Miss Smith said:

"Dr. Cornell . . . have you made up your mind?" Her voice became barely audible. "I mean, about what to do with me?"

Now, in the day light, Cornell saw that her eyes were softer looking. The silver specks were now a dark gray. She seemed young—almost girlish. Her manner exuded confidence and her speech was almost whimsical in intonation.

"I think you know," he said.

"Yes sir." A pleased curl formed on the edges of her full lips. "I won't *ever* be able to thank you enough," she bubbled. "I prayed so hard that you would keep me here and help me."

"I thought you would know it," Cornell sighed.

"Was it the dream that decided you?"

He hesitated a brief moment. "Well, yes. I prefer to think that it *was* the dream." He pushed the cowlick off his forehead with an impatient sweep of his hand.

She stood up and began piling the dishes in the sink, then started to wash them.

"Never mind that now," said Cornell, getting up too, "you can attend to that later. Right now, please come into the consultation room. I want to explain what we are going to do."

"Yes sir." She turned off the water and followed him out of the kitchen and into the office. At Cornell's direction, she lay on the couch and folded her hands under her head. Cornell darkened the room except for one small lamp near the head of the couch. Near this, Cornell sat down, pencil and notebook ready. It was quiet in the room. From the alley came the faint whirr of an air conditioning unit working.

"This is going to be difficult, Miss Smith," said Cornell. "More difficult than anything you've ever had to tackle in your life. I must have your fullest cooperation and I expect nothing less than that in view of the precarious situation I have placed myself in by taking this action."

"Oh, you *shall* have it, Dr. Cornell," said Miss Smith with great sincerity. "With all my heart you shall have it."

"Thank you," said Cornell. "Now, the point is: I intend to break down your dream—that is, interpret the symbols—into understandable clues. Clues that should lead to your identity, and, possibly, to the name of the person who killed that girl. Does that startle you?"

"A little—but I don't quite understand."

"First, let me explain what amnesia is. The mind can stand only a certain amount of pain, the amount varying with different persons according to their own individual sensitivity and constitutional make-up. In some persons, when

the mind is experiencing more pain than it can endure, the unconscious mind—the mind that actually governs our behavior—rings down a curtain on the conscious mind, blotting out all realities of the past. In some cases, amnesia is a stop gap, to prevent the mind from going off into complete and final escape —insanity."

"Yes sir," she said, mildly.

"In rare cases, amnesia can be physical in origin: from accident, disease of the brain, from toxins and so on. You, however, exhibit no symptoms except of hysteria amnesia, caused by an experience so painful and humiliating that the only solution was a complete change of identity. Your unpleasant experience may have been your witnessing the killing of the girl, or your *doing* the killing."

MISS SMITH turned her head on the couch to look at Cornell. "Yes," she almost whispered, "let's find out, once and for all if I did do it. If I did plunge that knife into that poor girl's throat I want to know. Please believe that."

Cornell went on:

"The important medium we have at our disposal is your dream. Another device might be narco-synthesis."

"A . . . drug?" He could see her composure was disturbed.

"Yes," he said. "Sodium amytal or sodium pantothal. Sometimes call the 'truth serum.' This drug dulls the conscious mind into a hypnotic state and permits the subconscious mind to speak without restrictions."

She stared at him, her eyes open and wide. "I beg you not to use it . . . I'm so afraid of drugs." A shudder passed through her body. "Just the mention of it makes me shake."

"It won't be necessary," said Cornell. "I've had little success with it in amnesia because of the strong subconscious resistance. Right now I believe better results can be achieved by working with your conscious associations to the various parts of your dream."

She turned her head to a straight position and closed her eyes again and a tiny sigh of relief escaped her lips.

"The dream," Cornell went on "serves many purposes, one of which is *not* to presage the future. That's utter bunk. Rather, the dream *retells the past*. When we sleep at night the unconscious mind releases repressed, pent-up, emotions—wishes, fears, hates and so on, via the dream. And the unconscious mind, to keep the conscious mind from recognizing these taboo emotions, resorts to symbols. Dream symbols."

"But why does the mind fool itself that way? It's sort of silly," Miss Smith said.

"For the same reason it repressed the emotion in the first place. It's taboo in that particular person's conscious make-up. A dream is like a detective story. You break down the symbols—clues—into realistic values and piece the puzzle together. We'll have daily sessions, some times two or three sessions a day, if necessary. The main requisite is that you relax your mind as completely as possible. Then we'll take each dream part in turn and you are to tell me the first thought that comes into your mind."

"I can do it."

"You understand the fundamentals clearly?"

"Yes sir.

"You understand you are going to be in a constant state of conflict with the truth?"

"Yes sir."

"Then we'll begin right now with the first part of your dream. The meaning, I'm sure, is apparent; much easier to

break down than the rest of the dream will be. It reads: *'I saw a girl and blood was streaming from all the pores of her body.'"*

Silence.

"What pops into your mind?" prompted Cornell.

"A girl bleeding. I can see her."

"Is it the girl with the knife in her throat?"

"I don't know."

"Relax, don't concentrate, don't force it. Is the bleeding girl still there?"

"Yes sir."

"The dream symbol, I believe, is obviously the girl who had been stabbed in the throat. Now . . ."

She interrupted, "I see letters."

"What are they?"

Slowly, "G-A-R-D-E M-A-L-A-D-E."

"Garde malade," repeated Cornell to her.

"I know the meaning of those words," she said quickly. "I suppose I know the French language because without any difficulty I know that those words mean guardian of the sick."

"Guardian of the sick. A *nurse,"* said Cornell triumphantly. "The girl who was murdered might possibly be a nurse." He got up and went around the room turning on the lights. Miss Smith watched him and she, too, stood up.

"We're finished?" she asked.

"For now. I don't want to overdo the first session." He sat down behind his desk.

"Then I'll rest in the bedroom, if you don't mind."

Cornell waved her away. "Of course not. It's your bedroom, until . . ." He stopped. Until when? Until what happens? He felt a gnawing tug at his stomach.

"Thank you," she said and she walked out, Cornell's eyes following her slender form, her easy, confident walk, the roundness of her hips.

THE phone rang and he picked up the receiver. The heavy, booming voice of the District Attorney thundered a greeting at him. Cornell smiled and held the receiver an inch or two away from his ear. He was fond of the D.A., a huge, likable man who always reminded him of Wendell Willkie.

"What were you doing over at East River Drive at one o'clock in the morning," the D.A. asked. The richness of his voice was like eating too many éclairs, and many a witness became sick from the overdose and broke down in confession.

"Searching for a breeze, Chief," Cornell said. The D.A. liked to be called "Chief," and Cornell was willing to extend this psychological necessity.

"I have a report here on it," said the D.A. "I'm assigning a special investigator to cover it."

"Who?"

"Sands. The Homicide Squad will squawk their heads off, but I should worry."

"I think I might be able to give Sands a lead on the murdered girl, Chief," said Cornell.

"Uh-huh."

"She might be a nurse. Have Ed check all the nurse registries and find out."

The D.A. made no reply. The lapse was painful to Cornell and he felt prickles on the back of his neck.

"That's funny," the D.A. said, finally.

"What is?"

"The girl *is* a nurse."

Cornell felt like a man who had just walked into a ladies' wash room.

The D.A. went on, "The killer removed everything that could possibly identify the girl—except the most complete identification you could want: a gold identification bracelet she wore,

complete with name, address and social security number, all nicely engraved."

"That was clumsy," said Cornell. (So was I, he thought to himself.)

"Maybe, maybe not. My guess is the killer wanted her identity known, or that the girl just carried no purse, no anything."

"Who is she, Chief?"

"Marion Hillman. She was working for Dudley Briggs, a rich semi-invalid. This Briggs is an old crank and worth a mint. The girl had no family, was raised by an orphanage and was thirty-four years old. The scanty information I've been able to collect indicates this Marion Hillman wasn't above using her feminine beauty for any opportunity that presented itself. She was about to marry Dudley Briggs."

"How old is he?"

"Fifty-four and he has arthritis. A hell of a note, isn't it? Well, Alex I'm going to hang up. You know me, always shooting off my big mouth and I'm liable to encroach upon your sensitivity by asking how *you* knew the girl was a nurse." The D.A. hung up.

CORNELL replaced the receiver in its cradle, sighed deeply, and mopped his face with a handkerchief. What *ever* had possessed him to put his career, his very freedom, in jeopardy this way?

I've got to watch my step, he told himself. I've got to remember that she is here now.

She stood framed in the doorway, small and slender, looking like an angel, her eyes shining like the devil's own, looking at him.

"His voice was so very loud . . ." she apologized. "Was it . . . the district attorney?"

Cornell nodded. "The girl's name is Marion Hillman. She worked for Dudley Briggs, a rich semi-invalid. Do the names mean anything to you?"

"Nn-nnn."

He put his elbow on the desk and held up his chin with his fist. He sat that way for a second or two, thinking, then with a rapid motion produced the small notebook from his pocket.

"The next part of your dream deals with a girl with beautiful red hair down to her ankles."

She walked into the room and sat down in the easy chair opposite the desk. She crossed her slim legs with a graceful sweep.

She said, "I'm thinking of the word 'procurer'," then looked at him, wonderingly.

"Procurer," Cornell repeated. "There's something in that. Procurer for what?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. I think of the word, but somehow I don't believe in it. Is that strange?" she closed her eyes.

Cornell didn't answer her question. "How about this," he said. "Break the word up into 'pro' and 'curer.' Or, interpreted, someone in favor of cures. Hence, a physician."

"It doesn't mean anything to me, sir."

"Still, it's quite possible our search now points toward a redheaded woman doctor. After I've visited Dudley Briggs I might be able to amplify this clue." He sighed.

"Am . . . am I doing badly?" she said, anxiously.

"Oh no," he said quickly. "You've done fine so far." He fanned himself with a sheet of paper. "By George, it's hot." Then again with that sudden motion he reached for the phone. I'll call my patients and cancel their appointments for this week. We don't want anybody else around if we can help it."

"Thank you, Dr. Cornell," she said. "Thank you so much for all you're undertaking because of me."

"Yes," said Cornell, wishing she wouldn't use that weak tone of voice, wouldn't look at him with that weary, lost look. "It had just better work, for both our sakes."

"It will, it will. You are capable of it."

"Thanks. At any rate, I believe we'll *know* who you are before long."

"I'll just stay here and pray my identity is favorable," she said, devotedly.

"You can say *that* again," Cornell added.

She started to repeat her utterance, but Cornell held up his hand and had to smile at her. "Never mind, Miss Smith. Once is sufficient."

"PAULINE!"

It was a raucous shout grating her nerves. Pauline made an annoyed face at herself in the mirror of her vanity and went on combing her hair with firm hard strokes that made her long red hair glisten and squeak as electricity was generated. Dudley would have to wait; indeed he would. He'd been screaming her name like that since eight o'clock. First for Marion, his nurse, then for Richard, finally for her. He *would* put her last, she thought. Indeed!

"Drat the lot of you!" Dudley shrieked from his room.

Pauline stood up, opened the door and called into the hallway, "Can't you wait five minutes, *please*."

His jumbled answer was an imitation of her last sentence, an irritating habit Dudley employed quite frequently. She went back to her vanity dresser and brushed her hair all the more vigorously. Cantankerous old man, she thought; why couldn't he be cheerful just once. To someone *other* than Marion, she thought grimly, and with resentment.

She stopped the brushing then began braiding her brilliant strawberry red hair on both sides, flattened the braids against the sides of her head, and pinned them flat. She used no make up on her wide face, except the slightest touch of powder and the faintest dash of orange lip-stick on her full heart-shaped lips. When she smiled, and it was a rare occasion these days for Pauline to smile, her teeth became prominent: large, strong, white teeth, evenly set.

She dressed hastily in a plain gray skirt, a white blouse closed at the neck, put on her black-rimmed, Harlequin-shaped glasses which she used for near-sightedness, and went out.

She knocked on the door of the room next to hers and walked in. She started to say something, then saw that Serena wasn't there, that her bed hadn't been slept in. She frowned and went out, walked to the other end of the hallway and entered her uncle's room.

"Well, *well!*" boomed Dudley Briggs. "You finally made it. Congratulations."

He was a big man, with a round, withered face covered with freckles in abundance. The top of his head was bald and red hair, the color of Pauline's but faded from the years, stood out humorously from both temples. His eyes were wide and dark blue, like Pauline's, and he sat up in bed.

"Don't be grouchy, Uncle Dudley," said Pauline. She was thinking of Serena's empty room.

"Don't be grouchy Uncle Dudley," Dudley imitated, wrinkling his face grotesquely. "No, don't be grouchy. Where is Marion? Why hasn't she brought me my breakfast? Where's Richard? Drat it, you all wouldn't care a hoot if I died tonight."

"Your darling *Marion* would care," Pauline said sarcastically. "Indeed she'd care very much."

"Leave Marion out of it." He made a wry face as he tried to stretch his

arthritic fingers, which had stiffened up over night.

PAULINE was used to these outbursts. Her uncle, she bemoaned, though rich from an oil strike out West many years ago, was completely lacking in culture or tact, a product of his early environment on the Barbary Coast in San Francisco, a background no amount of money could cover.

"Uncle, let's not quarrel this morning," said Pauline. "I'm worried. Serena hasn't slept in her room all night, and *where* is Marion?"

"Serena isn't here either?" He started stretching his knees and his body to produce circulation.

"What's happened to them?"

"I'm sure you aren't worried about Marion," Dudley snapped, between his grunts as his joints painfully eased themselves.

"I'm worried about Serena."

"Bah!" Dudley shouted.

"I'm not deaf, Uncle," said Pauline.

"You said it. Just stupid."

"Indeed."

"Indeed, indeed, *indeed!* I want my breakfast and drat your Serena," Dudley snapped.

"I'll have Rosamond bring you a tray."

"I want it now, not at lunch time. It takes that big horse six hours to climb one flight of stairs."

"All right, I'll bring it," Pauline sighed, wearily, moving out of the room.

"Just l i k e your father," Dudley called after her.

She had been waiting for the remark and she stiffened when it came. He'll never stop it, she thought. She was suffering and she knew she'd have to keep on suffering to keep Roff out of the mess, out of the house, from finding out about her. She could, at least, be strong in that. Let them all think what they wanted to. Let them think anything. But spare Roff any of it.

"Vain and selfish," Dudley attacked her. "He killed my sister, God rest her soul. She was a good woman."

Pauline whirled around to face him.

"Will you please stop talking about my father? He never harmed you."

"Oh, no. All he did was to drive himself and his wife into a brick wall."

Defensively, "It was an accident." She felt weak parrying his blows. Weak from anticipation of the next blow.

"Accident my eyebrow! He deliberately committed suicide and murdered my sister. He was insane—plain insane. And if you hadn't inherited some of his traits you never would've done that terrible thing in London. You're not really a doctor. You have no right to be one."

"You're *mean*, Uncle Dudley. You're cruel. My father's accident happened twenty years ago. About London, I've explained what happened a hundred times. You just don't want to listen and understand. You keep torturing me until you'll really drive me out of my mind."

"Ha!" exclaimed Dudley, sitting up again and pointing a swollen finger at his niece. "Mean and cruel, huh? All I did was to take you in at the age of ten and provide nurses for you and the best education. I sent you to a fine medical school in Germany to study medicine. Was it *my* fault what happened?"

"You've done as much for Richard, but you never even raise your voice to him, or throw it up to him."

"Richard's been through a lot. He's been a real man, fighting for his country." Dudley's voice became proud. "He wouldn't think of shaming my name the way you did."

"You're afraid of Richard, of his temper."

"Oh get out. I'm hungry. I want my breakfast."

Her cheeks burning with humiliation, Pauline went out. I hate him, she thought. I don't care what he's done for me. I hate him.

SHE walked down the wide marble staircase to the main floor. The Briggs home was on Fifth Avenue and Sixty-eighth Street, and was one of those four storey mansions popular forty years ago, when Dudley Briggs, recently come East after his oil strike, bought it. It was a sturdily constructed house, fire-proofed, with marble floors, thick rugs and Italian-onyx fire-places. All the rooms were tremendous and there was a small elevator.

In the dining room, Pauline found her cousin eating breakfast. She didn't say anything but sat down.

"My," said Richard, chewing on a sausage, "you look your usual cheerful self this morning." He was a tall, dark man of twenty-eight, well built and exceedingly handsome in a dark manner. Pauline glanced up at him, startled again by his extreme good-looks, even after twenty years.

"It's *him* again," said Pauline.

"The old crack-pot? What did he say?"

"About my father, as usual." She couldn't tell him about London. No one else knew besides Dudley and Serena. And — her heart sank as she thought of it—Marion had squeezed it out of Dudley.

"Oh that."

"Yes, that."

"Why all the stink? So your old man was nuts. So what?" Richard grinned at her.

She frowned back at him but didn't answer. She would get no help from Richard, she knew. She looked into his large, black eyes and turned her head away.

"I don't understand it," Richard went on. "He used to be crazy about you. Then when you came back from Europe he changed his will leaving everything to me. Then he changed it again, making us both beneficiaries." A pained look crossed Richard's face as he spoke about the latter change of will.

Pauline avoided the subject.

"Have *you* seen Marion, by any chance?"

"Marion? Isn't she here?"

"She and Serena haven't been home all night."

A faint smile formed on his lips. "I won't get hysterical if she decided to leave for good." Indignation showed in his eyes. "Im-*agine* the nerve of a girl to marry a fifty-four year old invalid."

"She'll do it yet," said Pauline. "She doesn't care about anything or anybody except what she can get for herself. It's Serena *I*'m worried about."

ROSAMOND came into the room from the kitchen. She was a tremendously fat, colored woman, with gray hair, a caricature of the "mammy" type of servant. Every inch she advanced was a deliberately planned, laborious action, and she wheezed with each step.

"Rosamond, fix a tray for Mr. Briggs and take it up to him, will you please," said Pauline.

"Nn-*nnn,*" said Rosamond flatly. "I'll fix de tray, but you's gonna take it up dem steps. I goes up there onct a day to clean an dat's all!"

"All right, get it ready and I'll take it up. I'm only having coffee this morning."

Rosamond made the distance back to the kitchen in record time. At the door she stopped and called back, "Oh yeah, dere's a man waitin' t' see de doctah. I put him in yore office."

"A patient?" Richard said maliciously. "Glory be."

"You're very funny," Pauline snapped at him.

"I feel too good to take anything seriously," he said. "Six months out of the Air Force. Free. Free as a bird. Nothing to do except take life easy."

Free, she thought. How could *she* get free, too.

"You know," said Richard, regarding her smugly across the table, "I had a crush on you when we were kids."

"Oh Richard, grow up."

"No fooling, I did. You were a pretty kid, with red hair, sparkling blue eyes and red cheeks. You're a pretty woman now, but you don't show off to advantage. A little rouge and lipstick, that hair combed out would help—and a pretty dress, not those mannish clothes you wear."

"I'm not interested, Richard," she said.

"I had a crush on you even when we *grew* up," he went on, undaunted.

"Indeed? Of course, we happen to be first cousins."

"It's worked before. But don't fret, the crush is gone. *Completely.*"

"I'm very glad." She meant it, too. Since Dudley had included her again in his will, Richard had never acted the same toward her.

"So'm I," said Richard. "I never cared for career women. They get frigid."

She blushed, the type of blush peculiar to a red-headed woman. "Are you going out today?" she said, stiffly.

"Uh-huh." He lit a cigarette and poured more coffee.

"Looking for a job?"

"Brrr!" he scowled at her. "Don't joke that way, Pauline. I'm just getting my bones acclimated to civilian life."

"What were you adjusting to *before* you went into the Army? I don't recall you ever looking for work."

It was her turn to attack.

He pointed upstairs, in a slow, indecisive motion that was characteristic of his manner. "When the old boy has all that dough? When there's Edna-Anne on my schedule? Don't be absurd, which you are. You know my ambition, Pauline."

"Yes. To get all the money you can accumulate the easy way and then go into politics. A lazy man's ambition." She stopped, suddenly tired. There was no use in furthering this conversation.

She stood up and said to him, "Have you heard from your parents?"

He nodded. "They're still in California. To hell with them." He looked at the ceiling. "Him, too," meaning Dudley, and a sombre look came into his black eyes, pushing away the humor that perpetually lurked there.

"Maybe," he said, "I wasn't too active before I went into the Army, but after my first mission as a bombardier I promised myself that if I ever got home alive, I'd treat myself splendidly. I'll *never* break that vow. You may think it's silly to want to be a politician, but that's the kind of power I want and will get."

"All right," Pauline humored him. "I'll see the patient. If you can find some additional ambition, take the tray up to Uncle Dudley."

SHE hurried from the room. She crossed the large, marble-floored foyer to the other side of the house, where she had set aside three small rooms as her unit of offices. A waiting room, her consultation room, and a treatment room.

As she entered the waiting room, she didn't look at the short, fat man sitting there, but said, "Come in, please," and

reached for the knob of the door to the inner office.

Her hand frozen on the knob, she fought to shake off the rigidity that had gripped her body. The faint glimpse she had caught out of the corner of her eye of the man sitting there had caused a terrible association in her mind.

Slowly, she turned around, her knees feeling weak, and she looked at the man. Somebody turned on a vacuum in her stomach.

The man was grinning at her, a cigarette hanging from his thick lips. He grinned from one side of his mouth. His features were flat and his face showed scarred tissue. His brown hair was straight and parted on the side and combed straight down to the temples, Hitler fashion. He wore a sloppy white tropical suit and a polo shirt underneath, neither of them without its share of smudges.

Good-by, Roff, she thought weakly. We can't survive this.

"Come in," she said hoarsely. He followed her in and sat down on a hard chair. She sank into her swivel chair, glad to get some support under her. She fumbled for a cigarette, her mind a confused mixture of a million thoughts, and managed to get it lighted.

"What can I do for you," she said. Bluff it through, she thought. Try and bluff it through anyway.

"Well, the truth is I got me a cough," said the man.

No doubt now. It *was* he, the cockney from London.

The man said, "The name is Bunny Craig."

"Is that name supposed to mean something to me?" she said.

BUNNY CRAIG shrugged his fat shoulders. The ashes of his cigarette dropped onto his lap.

"Wot can you do for me cough, *Doctor* Setton."

His stressing the word "doctor" made her squirm. "You smoke too much," she said. She couldn't break her mental paralysis for a better remark. Her throat felt like sandpaper.

"'Ere, you may be right, come to think o' it."

"What do you want, Mr. Craig?"

"A cough medicine, eh?"

"I'll write you a prescription," she said.

"To the tune o' five thousand, M'lady, I'll thank you."

She whirled on him. "You *miserable* creature! How did you get here?"

Craig looked surprised. "By boat, M'lady, same as you. I'm an American citizen, I'll 'ave you know, with rights to come o'er 'ere when I've a mind to."

"You . . ." she searched for a scorching word, couldn't find one. "An American citizen *indeed,*" she snapped.

"Aye, wot's so strange?" He took the cigarette from his mouth and dropped it into the ash tray on the desk. "Five thousand," he repeated.

"I gave you a thousand in London. You said that would be the last. I haven't any money and no way to raise such a large amount."

"Now, ain't that a shame. Go to 'im."

"Him? That's absurd. My uncle wouldn't give me a red cent for you again.

"Not 'im. I mean *'im.*" Craig winked at her, pursing his lips.

She felt the spasms of her neck muscles. "I don't know who you mean." But she did. She knew very well.

"The 'ell you don't. *'Im,* the great lawyer. 'E's got wads o' dough."

Fury raging within her, she wanted to get at him, to scratch his eyes out, to scratch that evil leer off his fat face.

"Oh, I seen you an' 'im at the zoo," Craig went on. "I been 'ere a month,

I 'ave."

"You . . . you blackmailing d o g. You . . ." She choked on her anger.

Bunny Craig held up his hand. "I 'elped you live again, M'lady. An' when you needed it badly, eh? An' this time I'll turn o'er the original to you. 'Ow's that?"

"Have you forgotten I can go to the police and tell them about the forgery?"

" 'Ell, go ahead. That's nothin' to the trouble it'll make for you—and the boy friend. Maybe the little blonde can 'elp you out, eh?"

"She's not here."

"Oh, she's been 'ere, all right. But 'ell, she don't count. Wot about the five thousand?"

"You'll . . . have to give me time." She stumbled.

"Am I 'ard 'arted? One week from today I'll be back to pick up me cough medicine." He coughed, mockingly. "It'll cure me quick, or kill *somebody,* thank you very much."

"Get out."

He winked at her again, rose, and walked out.

WHEN he was gone she couldn't keep the tears back. Silently, and with a heart filled with grief and confusion, she cried. Now what? she thought. What about Roff? No, *not* Roff. Roff was out of it. She would see to that. She would stop at nothing to spare him the ignominy of scandal.

She dried her eyes, applied powder to cover the redness and went out. She found the breakfast on the dining room table, the eggs and cereal cold. She took it up to Dudley anyway.

Dudley had gotten dressed and was sitting up in a chair, near the window. He looked up at her when she came in and she put the tray down on a table in front of him.

"I—I'm sorry it's cold," she said. "I . . . I had a patient. Emergency." She prepared herself for an outburst from him but it didn't come.

"Never mind, give it here." He compressed his lips and held the left side of his chest. "Drat it, the exertion of dressing alone was too much. I have pains in my heart."

"There's no indications of heart failure, Uncle Dudley. Will you stop acting foolish? The pains may be coming from a stomach condition. We'll know tomorrow when Dr. E d i s o n takes x-rays."

"Now, young lady, you wouldn't expect me to take your medical opinion—eh?" He started to eat, not looking at her.

She almost tried to explain again to him that what happened in London had nothing to do with her *knowledge* of medicine, but she didn't. Her uncle's mind was a solid wall, admitting one theory—h i s—and impervious to all others.

"I know what it is," Dudley said with a full mouth, "it's that dratted hocus-pocus picture somebody sent me."

"Nonsense."

"Nonsense, nonsense. That's all you and that pig-headed Edison ever say to me. *Nonsense.*" Some of the food popped out of his mouth as he ate. Pauline stood there watching him.

He stopped, aware she was there, and with one cheek bulging, he looked up at her. "Well . . . ? I can find my mouth all right."

"Uncle . . ."

He ran his hand over his bald, freckled head. "Ah, now it comes. That expression on your face, the sound of your voice." He screwed his face up and imitated, "Uncle, *dear Uncle Dudley,* I need some money."

"Five thousand," she blurted out.

"Hai!" he exclaimed, rocking his

head. "You *are* crazy. Go away," and he went back to eating his food.

"He's here . . . *Bunny Craig.*"

Dudley turned again to look up at his niece. "Pauline," he said slowly, and more softly, "I don't care. I don't care one miserly little bit. Have you got that straight? When you sent me that letter from London telling me what happened and that you needed a thousand dollars to pay Craig, I sent it. I sent it because I knew how much it meant to you, and because I was ashamed to ever have it known. But now I'm finished. Finished *once and for all!* Get out of here and leave me alone."

She rushed out, feeling miserable and humiliated. She regretted bitterly having asked him for the money. She should have known that such would be his reaction, she should have known that ever since Marion Hillman came into her uncle's life nothing had been the same for her and Richard.

Downstairs, the chimes announced somebody at the front door, and she went down to answer it, apprehension gripping her heart that it might be Roff. Every time the chimes rang she was certain Roff had found out where she lived.

CHAPTER IV

ALEXANDER CORNELL, M.D., walked up the seven white stone steps of the Briggs Mansion. He pushed the button and could hear a three-note chime sound off inside the house.

The door was opened by a staid-looking woman of probably thirty-one or -two, with brilliant red hair braided around her head. She wore black-rimmed glasses and looked at him with very blue eyes. It seemed to Cornell that she was relieved to see him. At least, she seemed to relax after her first glance.

"Good morning," he said, experimentally.

"Yes?"

"My name is Alexander Cornell and I'd like to come in and see Dr. Setton."

She hesitated, looking undecided and just the least bit wary, Cornell thought. Then she opened the door wide and said, "Come in, please."

Inside, Cornell looked around at the tremendous foyer, with the marble floor, wall tables, pedestals holding up busts of men he couldn't recognize, the wide stairway winding upwards.

"I am Dr. Setton," Pauline said.

Cornell turned to look at her, pleased that the dream of his amnesia had produced such a splendid result—for here indeed was the woman physician with the long red hair.

"I'm Dr. Cornell, attached to the District Attorney's office," he said. He was going to add the truth that he was not there in an official capacity, but he decided not to.

He produced his wallet and let her see his identification card. Pauline took it and glanced at it, but Cornell could see that her eyes weren't reading the print, that she was looking right through the card, her mind speculating on some other matter. He observed, too, the mannish clothes she wore and that her figure was good, if a trifle plump.

"You had a nurse working here? A Miss Marion Hillman?"

"Yes, my uncle is a semi-invalid and . . ." she stopped and her mouth parted, the lips curled back slightly, revealing her large white teeth. "Wh-what do you mean *had?*"

"Marion Hillman is dead," said Cornell. "She's been murdered."

A long, drawn out silence hovered between them. Then Pauline blinked her eyes, covered her mouth with the back of her hand, and her eyes widened at him. For a second she swayed on her

feet and Cornell thought she might faint.

"I'm sorry to put it so bluntly," he apologized.

She regained her composure and shook her head. "It's all right. Indeed, it's j u s t as well . . ." She stopped, a look of realization coming into her eyes.

Cornell wondered j u s t why she thought it was just as well that Marion Hillman had been murdered, but he said nothing.

"Has anything happened to Serena?" Pauline said finally.

"Not that I know of. Who is Serena?"

"Serena Chalmers, a friend of mine. She'd been staying with me for the summer, but she hadn't come home last night."

"Can you describe her?" said Cornell, holding his breath. This might just be it.

"English girl, small, blonde, and very pretty."

Ah, that was Miss Smith neé Serena Chalmers. Cornell felt pleased that her name was Serena. It rolled on his tongue, as though he were tasting a delicacy.

"No," he said aloud, "I've heard nothing about her."

PAULINE nodded blankly and indicated a door at the other end of the foyer. He followed her into her office and sat down in the seat Bunny Craig had occupied earlier that morning. Pauline walked around to her swivel chair behind the desk.

Cornell provoked the conversation, "When did you see Miss Hillman and Serena Chalmers last, Dr. Setton?"

"Yesterday, after supper. Marion, the nurse, went to a movie."

"And Helena?"

"She went for a walk about nine o'clock."

"Are there any pertinent facts you can tell me about either of the two ladies?" Cornell said.

"Am I bound to?"

"Not if you don't want to. All I can do, if I feel there is need for questioning, is to advise the district attorney to issue a subpoena for you." This was true enough. He added, "I promise I won't."

Pauline's eyes seemed to come back from the void and focus on reality. "Just what is your capacity there, Dr. Cornell?" she said.

"I function in that arm of the district attorney's office known as the Bureau of Psychiatry and Legal Medicine, as a special appointee. I am *not* the medical assistant of that office."

"Oh . . ." Pauline shrugged slightly. "What can I tell you. Marion Hillman was a very good and competent nurse. My uncle was completely reliant on her. Anything else I say about her would serve to incriminate me . . ." She spoke with difficulty, as though it were a great effort.

"I gather then, you didn't like her?"

"What would your feelings be toward a pretty woman of thirty-four who was going to marry a man of fifty-four who was crippled with arthritis—but who had a great deal of money?" Pauline said with more force.

"I see," said Cornell. Perhaps, he thought, this would not be as difficult as he had pictured it.

"What about Serena Chalmers?" he added.

Pauline frowned slightly at him. "Are you sure, Dr. Cornell, that Serena is . . . is not . . . I mean, you seem so anxious to know about her."

"Quite sure," he said. Had he been that obvious? "She'll turn up unharmed, I'm sure."

"How did Marion . . . I mean with what . . .?"

"A copper or gold-bladed knife with a brown leather handle. Alligator leather, I believe."

"Oh . . ." her head turned and Cornell saw her eyes scanning the desk top. Then she looked back at him and there was a look of utter weariness in her eyes. "That wasn't a knife. It was a leather-handled envelope-opener and it belonged to me." Her voice when she spoke was dull and monotone and filled with hopelessness.

Cornell made no remark to this revelation because he didn't himself know the significance.

"Would you mind," he said, "showing me through Serena's room?"

"I'm sorry, Dr. Cornell. Serena is my guest and I'm sure she wouldn't like that. Indeed, it would be quite an insult to her."

"Then posibly I could speak with your uncle?"

Her attitude toward him had become chilled, and she stood up. "Of course. I'll take you to him."

AS THEY walked out of the room and to the stair case, Cornell said, "Was Serena a very good friend of yours?"

"Yes . . ." Pauline said slowly, again casting him that puzzled look, "a very good friend. We went to the same medical school in Germany."

"Oh, I see. Serena is a physician, too."

"Well . . . no. War broke out when we had completed our third year at the University of Heidelberg. I came back here and finished at Columbia."

"And Serena never finished?"

"No, not exactly. She . . . Well, Serena liked a good time. Lots of dancing, a few drinks. She didn't devote enough time to study and . . ."

"She flunked out," Cornell finished for her.

"Yes."

Cornell considered this a surprising revelation for Pauline Setton to make in view of her latter statement that Serena was her house guest and a very good friend. They arrived at the top of the stairs and Pauline knocked on the door opposite the landing.

"Come in," the raucous voice of Dudley Briggs growled. He was sitting in the same chair, reading a newspaper.

"Uncle, this is Dr. Cornell, from the District Attorney's office."

Dudley offered no acknowledgement of the introduction and he didn't look up at his visitor.

"Sit down and save your breath," he said. "I know about Marion." He slapped the newspaper with the back of his hand. "Drat the killer. I say God damn the killer to eternal torture!" Genuine remorse filled his husky voice.

"I'm sorry," Cornell said, sitting down. He was a little taken aback with Dudley's gruff manner, his lack of courtesy and decency.

"She was a sweet girl," Dudley said. "A good nurse, and the best friend I had in this house. Been with me two years and we were going to be . . ." He broke off and now he turned his head and gazed into Cornell's eyes.

Cornell flinched a little at the sight of the large withered face, the millions of freckles, and the two tufts of red hair sticking out from each temple.

"What do you want?" Dudley said.

"I came to bring you the news of Marion's death. I was the one who discovered her body."

"I've already phoned the Homicide Squad. I told them all I know about Marion, and about Serena Chalmers not coming home last night. There's nothing I can add."

"Uncle," said Pauline, her voice indignant, "Why did you involve Serena so needlessly?"

Dudley pointed to the door. "Drat

it, get out and leave us alone," he snapped, without humor.

Cornell saw her cheeks get red, and she whirled around, walked out, and slammed the door behind her.

Dudley calmed down. "What do you know about witchcraft, Dr. Cornell? Or are you another one of those stubborn nincompoop medical men who scoff at it and say nonsense?"

"Not at all. But what are you referring to? There are several kinds of witchcraft."

"The kind where you get sent a picture of a doll resembling you, with a needle stuck through the heart."

"It can work. There are many actual case histories of deaths due to no more than witchcraft suggestion. William Seabrook, an unbiased expert, has written volumes on it."

DUDLEY reached into his inner jacket pocket and from a secretarial wallet withdrew a three by six picture and handed it over to Cornell. It was a picture of a doll with red hair and a round face, unmistakably a caricature of Dudley Briggs. A needle protruded from over the area of the heart.

"I got that two months ago, in the mail," Dudley explained. "Three weeks ago I started getting pains in my heart. Pauline and Dr. Edison laughed at me and say nonsense. They think the pain is coming from my stomach, and tomorrow morning Dr. Edison is going to x-ray me."

"Stomach trouble can cause chest pains, but in your case I doubt it."

"You mean . . .?" Dudley looked positively grateful.

"Size up the situation, Dudley. You've been a semi-invalid with arthritis and you're not getting any younger —and the first thing aged people begin to worry about is their heart."

Dudley nodded slowly.

"In that condition, you've become sensitive and hypochondriacal. I could tell you right now that in two days you'll have a pain in the lobe of your left ear, and by Jove, you will. The unconscious mind can cause pain in *any* part of the body, which the psychoanalytical clinics, and the science of hypnology, has proved."

"Ha!" exclaimed Dudley, a pleased look on his homely face. "*Now* a doctor is talking some sense to me. Go on."

Satisfied to have broken down Dudley's antagonism, Cornell explained further.

"Witchcraft can work, but it can never work unless the intended victim knows about it, for witchcraft is nothing more than subtle self-hypnotism. The idea is implanted in the individual's unconscious mind and damage can be done."

"All right. What're you going to do to help me?"

Cornell smiled at him reassuringly.

"You'll never die from this kind of witchcraft, Dudley. It's crude and very ineffective. And, by Jove, I don't believe it was really intended to accomplish anything."

"Then why? In God's name, *why?*"

"Whoever sent that, might have been trying to establish an *intent*."

"Ha," Dudley exclaimed, softly, the skin across his brow tightening. "You mean somebody wants to kill *me?*"

"It's a possibility to consider. Your nurse was killed and you're a very rich man, Dudley."

Fear showed in his eyes.

"It's Pauline, that dratted niece of mine. Her father was insane. He drove a car into a brick wall, killing himself and my sister. She shows signs of inheriting some of it."

Cornell started to get up.

"No, no wait," Dudley cried. "Maybe it's Richard. He's never forgiven

me. He hates me. He always wanted my money. He and Pauline hated Marion because she was going to marry me."

"Take it easy," said Cornell. "It won't help to go on suspecting everybody. Millions of people have motives to murder somebody else, but murder is not in the make-up of millions of people. The motive has to fit the psychology of the murderer."

"Yes, but there are others . . ."

"Just keep remembering to yourself that this is a crude attempt to make you hypnotize yourself into assimilated heart trouble. That's all. You won't succumb to it once you know how it works."

Dudley gripped his hands tightly. "All right. I'll try."

"Have the X-rays taken tomorrow anyway, then that'll be off your mind." This time Cornell stood up. "I'd like to have your permission to see Serena's room, if I may."

"Go ahead. It's the second door at the other end of the hallway," Dudley said, sinking back in his chair.

"Thanks. I'll see you again, I hope." He went out and closed the door quietly.

IN THE hallway, Cornell knew which was Serena's room because Pauline was standing in front of the door. He walked over to her.

"Your uncle has given me permission to examine the room, Pauline." He waited for her reaction to his using her first name more than the announcement of permission. She seemed not to care how he addressed her.

"Indeed, I thought he would. I'm sorry, Dr. Cornell. I won't belittle Serena this way. You will have to use force to get past me."

Cornell smiled. "Heaven forbid! The deuce with it if it's going to create an issue. Not that important." There was a basic hardness to her, he thought. A basic determination in her inner-self that seemed to match her strong white teeth.

He turned around and walked to the staircase and she walked with him.

"He told you, didn't he?" Pauline said.

"About you hating Marion?"

"No, about my father."

"Yes, he did."

She was silent. Then, softly, "I don't care, let him. It was an accident. It was raining. It was on cobblestones. Why does everyone call it suicide?"

He couldn't answer her, because immediately Dudley Brigg's raucous voice yelled out:

"Cornell, you still there?"

"Yes."

"Come back here! I want to tell you something."

Pauline followed Cornell back up the stairs. Dudley had his door open and was standing in the opening, leaning on two canes.

"Uncle Dudley," cried Pauline. "You'll fall."

"Fall my eyebrow. Cornell, I want to hire you."

"Hire him?" Pauline glanced from one face to the other, settled on her uncle's. "Hire him for what?"

"To find the person who sent me that witchcraft picture. Then we'll have the one who murdered Marion and who wants to murder me."

"I'm not for hire, Dudley," Cornell said, shaking his head.

"Drat it, every man's for hire," Dudley growled.

"I'll do everything in my power to find out who sent you the witchcraft picture, and, of course, to find out who killed Marion." For an instant his mind flashed back to his office and Serena. "But you can't pay me for it. I don't need the money."

"Good enough," said Dudley, and went back into his room.

Going back down the stairs, Pauline demanded:

"*What* did you tell him? Who's trying to kill him?"

"I don't know. But that witchcraft picture struck me as an attempt to establish an intent to murder Dudley and was not intended at a murder weapon. I told him as much."

Downstairs, Richard was coming out of the library door.

"Pauline . . ." he blurted out hastily, "Marion has been . . ." Then he saw Cornell and stopped. Pauline introduced the two men. Cornell was impressed by Richard's resemblance to Tyrone Power; a tall, dark young man, with a square jaw and alert black eyes, and long, black, wavy hair.

"I know, Richard," Pauline said. "Dr. Cornell brought the news."

"I heard it on the radio. I'm dumbfounded." His speech was slow, drawling. "Why Marion?"

Cornell said to him, "Did you hate her too?"

The conflicting emotions in Richard's eyes puzzled him. Of course he had hated Marion Hillman. But the hate was set against something else.

"We went out a few times together," Richard drawled. "Movie, dinner; once a night club. We weren't serious. Then she decided to marry Dudley after he'd asked her to. You bet, I resented such a match."

"She was killed with *my* envelope-opener. From my *desk,*" Pauline said. "And Serena's still missing."

"Say," Richard looked thoughtfully at her. "Do you suppose Serena's had another attack?"

"Attack?" Cornell's heart beat faster. "What sort of an attack?"

"Serena's home in London was hit by a German robot bomb. Almost a direct hit. Her father and mother and younger brother were all killed. She was thought to be dead, since there were a few unidentified bodies around, but evidently Serena had seen her family killed and suffered an attack of amnesia. She was found wandering around, unidentified, and was taken to a hospital. It took pretty near a year to bring her out of it."

By George, a year and a half, Cornell thought. And he was counting on no more than a week to do the same job! He looked at Richard's discharge button in the lapel of his jacket and said:

"Army?"

"Air Force. And please don't ask me how I liked it and did I see much action." Humor filled his dark eyes and Cornell observed that it belonged there.

"I won't then," he smiled at the tall ex-flyer, excused himself, and he left the house.

OUTSIDE, the sun was hot, the air humid. A car pulled up and Special Investigator Ed Sands jumped out. He was a mild-mannered, red-faced man.

"Morning, Doc," Sands said, and strolled past Cornell and into the house without asking a question.

Cornell grinned after the short, squat figure and walked over toward Madison Avenue, his mind reflecting on the persons he had encountered. Pauline Setton, M.D. stood out in his mind. Reserved, quiet, basic determination, but an over-all weakness, in perpetual conflict with herself. He could judge those unsolved inner conflicts in a person by their eyes, their degree of stability. An air of coldness about her. Frigid? Possibly. He wouldn't hazard a guess.

Then Richard Briggs. Conceited, as an exceptionally handsome young man is bound to become. Lady-killer type. Lively, humorous chap, not overly am-

bitious . . . Involved a good deal more, emotionally, with Marion Hillman than just hating her for trying to snatch his uncle and his money. Underneath the humor, resentment. Of what?

And Dudley Briggs. Hardly capable of killing the girl, yet he was the focal point. Cornell felt quite sure of that. And a likable old hypochondriac once you could fathom him, he thought.

Then he was aware of a figure following him. Cornell stopped, half turned, and bent over to fix his shoe laces. The other man stopped, too. In his instant appraisal he saw his follower was a short, fat man, wearing a soiled white tropical suit. Cornell straightened up and continued walking.

At the corner of Madison he turned the corner and waited.

The short fat man came by in a hurry, saw Cornell, gave an almost imperceptible expression of surprise and went on walking. Cornell came back to the corner and continued walking East, crossing Madison Avenue. He glanced back. The short fat man was no where to be seen.

Concerned at this new turn of events, Cornell tried to figure it out. There was no logical explanation why this short fat man was following him. Perhaps, after all, it was an innocent coincidence and he was only reading importance into the happening.

On the corner was a lady's shop called "Audrey's." He went into it and was confronted by a saleslady.

"My niece," he explained, "has paid me a visit. Unfortunately, she has lost her valise in some mix up at the railroad station. Will you select two dresses, cool, comfortable ones, and some . . . er, some underthings to go with it."

"What is your niece's size, sir?"

"Well . . . let me see. I wanted her to come herself, but she won't be seen out in the one ragged dress she has left."

A smile formed on the saleswoman's lips. A knowing smile. Cornell saw it and prayed he wouldn't blush. He said hastily, "She's thirteen years old. About five feet tall, weighs almost a hundred pounds. Will that do?"

"Yes sir. I'll pick them out and have them wrapped."

"I'll wait outside," said Cornell, fidgety.

Ten minutes later the saleswoman called him back and handed him the package. Cornell paid her and hurried out of the store, thankful this task was over and done with.

He headed back to his office, and it was then that he noticed that the short fat man was again walking in back of him.

"By George," Cornell said to himself, "this is stretching coincidence a little too far."

CHAPTER V

CORNELL debated to himself whether he should stop the strange man and ask his intentions, or continue on to the office. In the latter case, he would provide the fat man with the knowledge he was evidently seeking: where Cornell lived.

Nothing could be gained, he reasoned, by stopping him. He could expect no answer except indignation. He would go directly to his office, let the man see where he lived, and perhaps in that way force the strange man's hand. That his follower knew about Serena was unthinkable.

He was soaked with perspiration when he arrived at the office. He let himself in with his key. "It's all right," he called, in case Serena should be startled. "It's I, Dr. Cornell."

Serena came out to him. She was lovely to look at and Cornell had to

pause and stare at her. The silver flecks in her gray eyes twinkled with what seemed to Cornell to be whimsical appreciation of his own admiring glances.

"You look pleased," said Cornell.

"I feel so much better, thanks to you," she smiled.

Cornell tossed the boxes on the chair and he hoped the manner in which he did it was indifferent enough.

"I've bought two dresses and some underthings for you," he said. "I hope the taste and size will be right."

"Oh . . ." Her eyes blinked and she said in a voice low and filled with emotion, "You are so very, *very* kind to me."

"Don't bother looking at them now. Sit down and I'll tell you who you are."

She sat down in her favorite easy chair, the large mohair in front of the desk, and waited, her face set.

Cornell said quickly, "You are Serena Chalmers, of London, England."

She sat, silent.

"In London," said Cornell, "your home was bombed and your family killed. Your parents and a younger brother. You went into amnesia and it required a year to cure you."

She spoke in her peculiar, bubbly voice:

"My . . . my family . . . killed?"

"Is it painful for you to hear that?"

"I feel no pain. It doesn't mean anything to me. My reaction is interest and bewilderment," she said.

He continued, "You came here for a summer visit to your friend, Pauline Setton, a physician, with whom you went to medical school in Germany. The University of Heidelberg. She is the woman with the long red hair of your dream. Her uncle, Dudley Briggs, is a semi-invalid, with arthritis, and Marion Hillman, the girl killed with the knife in her throat, was his nurse. Also in the house is Richard Briggs, recently out of the Air Force, a handsome—and I do mean handsome—dark-haired man who resembles Tyrone Power of the movies. Does any of it mean anything to you?"

"No sir. Pauline . . . tell me about her. The name starts me thinking. . . ."

"She is about five feet five inches tall. Beautiful strawberry red hair which she keeps braided flat to the sides of her head. No make-up. Pretty, basically, in a dull way. Wears mannish clothes. There is some question of her father having committed suicide, killing her mother with him, and this bothers her greatly. She hated Marion Hillman, the nurse, because she had accepted Dudley's offer of marriage, and Richard shares her hatred for the same reason."

"You said I went to medical school with *her?*"

"Uh-huh. But you were flunked out at the end of the third year. It seems you thought more of dancing and having a good time than studying. Pauline came back to America because of the war and finished her studies at Columbia University."

"You must think I'm a dolt."

"I can't think any specific item about you at all, Serena."

"Serena . . ." she repeated. "It's a nice name, isn't it?"

CORNELL nodded. "It's a beautiful name. But I'm still in the dark about you. Your background, we know, is middle-class English family. We know you have a strong pleasure-aim drive. That's why your mind couldn't stand stark reality and so it blotted out your identity. This is your second attack of amnesia and poses the question: couldn't your mind accept the reality that you killed Marion Hillman and so blotted out the whole incident?"

"Oh God!" she sighed softly.

"But," added Cornell, "in your favor is the fact that there seems to be ample motive for the killing of the girl in the Briggs Mansion. Richard is a ne'r-do-well, who was banking on his uncle's inheritance, when suddenly his uncle not only decides that his cousin, Pauline, is to share the inheritance, but wants to marry his nurse, Marion Hillman. This step would have cut his inheritance to a minimum. Pauline's motive is the same, in addition to something else she keeps back and which I couldn't fathom at the time."

Serena opened her eyes, and there was a look of relief in them. "Then I have a chance?"

"You have a very great chance."

"Tell me about Dudley Briggs, please, Dr. Cornell."

"Red hair like Pauline's around the temples. Fifty-four years old. Freckled face, and bald freckled head. Keeps heckling Pauline about the death of her father and mother, and there is a great deal of conflict in the triangle of Dudley, Pauline and Richard, with Dudley being the main focal point. Two months ago, Dudley received a witchcraft picture in the mail."

"A what?"

"A ridiculous attempt at witchcraft. A picture of a doll resembling Dudley with a pin stuck through the heart. Dudley *had* begun to develop heart pains, but he would, being old and hypochondriacal. His being taken to Dr. Edison—whom I gather is the family physician—tomorrow morning for x-rays to see if the pains are coming from a stomach condition."

She fluttered her fingers in the air. "It's all so very confusing."

"I suppose it would be to you, now. But these persons remain sharply drawn in my mind. Richard, Pauline, Dudley. They will all shape up in your dream, I'm sure."

"Yes sir," she said meekly.

"And think about this," Cornell told her. "Be cautious. If the murderer suspects that you are here and what we are doing he's going to try and stop it. Is that clear? Your life and my life can be his next objective."

"Yes sir." She didn't sound afraid.

"For example, there was a little fat man, who followed me from the Briggs Mansion all the way here. It's a warning sign. Keep all the blinds drawn at all times. Don't go out, don't open the door for anybody, don't touch the telephone."

"All right," she said.

"If anything *should* happen and I'm not here, in the upper right drawer of my desk are two pistols. I'll show you how to use one, though I've never touched them in all my life."

"Yes," said Serena.

"I'm going out tonight," Cornell said. "A meeting of the Psychoanalytic Association and if I don't attend I'll be conspicuous by my absence. I must keep my actions as normal as possible. And a psychiatric meeting without Alexander Cornell is not normal."

She glanced up at him and smiled. "You're not conceited about your work, are you?"

"Of course I am," he said, frankly, surprised that she should ask.

The rest of the afternoon was idled away with Serena resting in the bedroom and Cornell trying to finish an article he was doing for the Psychoanalytic Quarterly—but concentration was difficult. At seven o'clock he turned on the radio for the news, and with Serena breathing in his ear, they both heard that a nation wide alarm had been sent out for the missing Serena Chalmers."

CORNELL awoke late, Wednesday morning.

"Lazy bones," Serena called to him from the doorway, "you will get cold bacon, I'm certain."

Cornell y a w n e d, stretched and jumped off the couch. "Love it cold," he said in the middle of another yawn. His voice was throaty from sleep. For a man of forty-three, his body was lean and wiry, with no indication of middle-age spread.

He went into the bathroom, shaved and showered, came out humming to himself. He went into the bedroom he had relinquished to Serena. It was the same room but it was different. There were two dresses hanging in his closet; there was a slip draped over a chair. There was something, he decided, about a room lived in by a woman that made even the furniture look different.

He dressed in fresh clothing and went into the kitchen. Serena looked radiant, this hot morning. She had pinned her honey blonde hair atop her head, upsweep style, revealing a slender white neck. She was wearing one of the new dresses he had bought—a pale blue cotton.

Cornell sat down at the table and tried to keep his eyes away from her. She was too pretty, too desirable. Her figure curved as audaciously as she had acted—and now, sitting in the bright kitchen with the sunlight streaming in, her eyes were again angelic, to fit her appearance. He didn't want his emotions to get involved. He wanted to view the problem, now that he was deep in it, objectively. And this attempt at objectivity, he knew, was a defense mechanism again his subjectivity.

Again the breakfast was bacon and eggs. The invigorating odor of the coffee was weakened by the smell of the humid air outside, by the promise that today would be as hot, if not hotter, than the previous sixteen days. They ate without speaking, t h e n Cornell lighted her cigarette for her and said, "Please come i n t o the consultation room. I prefer early morning sessions when possibly the mind is midway between the fantasies of sleep and the realities of the day, and results are usually better."

She jumped up, full of eagerness, and went with him into the other room, and lay down on the couch. Cornell closed the blinds and turned on the small lamp at the head of the couch.

He produced his note book.

"Now," he said, "the next part of your dream relates that a man came in and he was so ugly you couldn't look at him. You turned away but you could still see him through the mirror. He shook a warning finger at you and you noticed that the finger was a *black key*."

She said nothing, not moving.

"*Who* is the ugly man, Serena?" said Cornell.

"I don't know."

"But you can't escape him. Do you realize you can *never* escape him? No matter which way you turn you can see him through the mirror. He's always there. *Who* is he?"

The skin across here forehead tightened and her jaw was thrust forward slightly.

"I don't know," she sighed, in an agonized voice. "I'm afraid of him . . . He's gruesome a n d so . . . wrinkly."

Cornell kept on:

"The mirror is your mind. *He*, the ugly man, is in your mind, and turning your eyes away avails you nothing. He is in your mind and you have to discharge his *identity*."

"But I can't! What am I to do when I can't?"

"The ugly man," said Cornell, "is very likely the murderer. The man may be a woman, since the dream symbol

often resorts to negatives to conceal the truth. It may be a very beautiful woman, or a very handsome man. He, or she, is the murderer of Marion Hillman. He or she has become so ugly in your mind because of the terrible crime committed."

SERENA clasped her cheeks with her palms and agitated them in a circle. "For a brief moment I had the feeling that the point of my mind was reaching back into my forgotten memory and was going to make contact. Then I saw the black key and had the most awful sensation of fear. It's really the black key that scares me, Alex."

Cornell was aware that she had used his first name but kept hammering at her:

"The ugly man, the killer, shakes a warning finger at you. You are afraid he knows you saw him kill Marion Hillman, the nurse. You see him as threatening to kill you, too, if you reveal his identity. He threatens you with death, hence the color black for the key. The key is the answer to the mystery, the identity of the killer."

She stopped rubbing her cheeks, and turned her head away to face the wall. Cornell stared at the whiteness of her neck.

"Don't fear it," he argued, his mild, low voice filling the room. "You're safe. You can tell *me* what the Black Key is. You can reveal the murderer to me and I will protect you. Your mind is in conflict because of your terrible fear that you will meet death. Indeed, you might have some notion of loyalty to the murderer, opposed by your loyalty to society. Thus, the blotting out of all reality by amnesia. A simple solution to a complex problem—but, Serena, *no* solutions are simple actually."

She spoke to the wall:

"I understand. I understand *everything* you say to me, everything you want me to do. But I can't do it. I'm frightened and exhausted and something begins to rise in my chest and I feel like screaming. Please, Alex, please let's stop for now." The whimsical, bubbly voice was in evidence now.

"All right," sighed Cornell, getting up, and opening the blinds slightly for the sun to seep through. "We'll let it alone for the time being." He helped her up, and her arm was soft and smooth and he fought off the tight feeling gripping his stomach.

She went into the bedroom and he sat down at his desk, glad to get her out of his sight so that he could attempt to think rationally. But he didn't. He kept thinking about her. He kept thinking about the little fat man who had followed him home. He kept thinking of what a change this whole thing had wrought in his life—a life quite suited to him. And he kept thinking of the danger—he, Alexander Cornell, in danger, a situation foreign to him if anything had ever been.

CHAPTER VI

"IF YOU don't stop acting like a baby I'm going to leave here and go home," Pauline warned her uncle. Beads of sweat formed on her upper lip and she patted it with an already damp handkerchief.

Dudley mimicked her, *"If you don't stop acting like a baby,"* and he made a wry face saying it. "Drat it, how should I act? I ache and hurt all over. Here, help me out."

Pauline helped him out of the taxi, then paid the cab fare. They both stood on the sidewalk, in the blazing sun, in front of the building containing Dr. Burton Edison's office.

"I'll fly into the dratted office," Dud-

ley kept after her, sarcastically, in his hoarse, raspy voice. "I'll fly like a winged elephant!"

The heat was making them both irritable, Pauline realized, and she tried to control herself. "Please stop complaining. It doesn't help." She was in no mood to argue with her uncle today. All she could think of all night was the leather handled envelope-opener missing from her desk, about Serena, and about Roff. Poor, dear Roff.

Dudley managed to make Edison's office, sweating profusely as he lumbered along on his two canes. Fortunately, Edison's office was on the ground floor, having a separate entrance on street level.

Dr. Burton Edison was close to forty years of age at first impression, but when you observed him carefully you saw that the thick glasses he wore was responsible for thinking about four years onto his age. He was a tall, slender man, with thick dark brown hair, a long sharp face, brown mustache and a prominent nose. He looked like a doctor. To Pauline, he always looked like a research scientist, his dark myopea eyes distorted behind the thick lenses he peered through.

"Good morning, Pauline . . . Dudley, Edison smiled at her "Sharp nine o'clock. Thanks for being prompt . . . How are you?" He spoke rapidly, energetically. His hands were never still for one moment, the fingers moving incessantly.

"I'm all right, Burt," Pauline said, with just the necessary decorum and cordiality. She had never liked Dr. Edison overly much. His nervous energy annoyed her, it made her tighten up. And then that one time he had tried to lecture her on career women. She couldn't take that, not at that time, and she spoke rather harshly to him in a complete loss of temper.

"And Richard?" Dr. Edison asked.

Dudley cut in, growling in his peculiar, imitating voice: "And Richard? And Pauline? And the man in the moon? Don't anybody ask me how *I* feel. I'm only the patient. I only pay the damned bills."

Dr. Edison laughed, but there was no humor in his voice or in his eyes. Pauline, watching him closely, knew how much he hated Dudley Briggs. It had been almost a certainty that he was going to marry Marion Hillman, until Dudley applied the pressure to Marion, offering more money, more freedom, than Edison could possibly meet. The blow to Edison had been severe, and Pauline, always wary of the hate he bore for her uncle, felt sorry for him, sorry that he had loved Marion so completely and had never gotten over it.

"No need to ask you, you old fraud," Edison said, trying to give the impression that he was used to the old man's cantankerous moods and mimicking, Pauline observed. "Your face shows plainly you're a hypochondriac with delusions about witchcraft hocus-pocus and imaginary heart pains."

"Then why are you taking X-rays, you quack pill-peddler? You can't *see* imaginary pains," Dudley growled.

"To ease your mind," said Edison.

"Suppose you ask Dr. Cornell about that. There's a damn good doctor. Sensible."

"Cornell," Edison frowned. "Alexander Cornell?"

"Hai!" Dudley exclaimed. "You know him well enough."

"I read a short biography on him in the Medical Weekly," Edison snapped. "He's the District Attorney's special appointee for matters of psychiatric investigation. He has made a name for himself via his writings, and his chief contribution is his theory that psychiatry and religion and the mores of

society can work hand in hand."

"Indeed, I remember glancing at that," Pauline said, interested. "I was sent a copy," Edison said: "This fellow Cornell was born into Boston society, the only son of a prominent Boston physician and a novelist mother. He inherited a large amount of money." Edison's rapid voice became bitter. "So what about him, mmm?" He shot the question at Dudley.

"He said the pains can come from suggestion and probably does."

Edison shrugged and reached under his desk and pushed a button. "What did he want to see you about?"

"The murder of my nurse, Marion Hillman."

"Ah . . . darn shame," said Edison and he turned his head away. Pauline strained her eyes to see the change on his face but couldn't.

Dudley lifted a cane and pointed it almost in the doctor's face. "You'd been crying your fool head off because Marion turned you down, Edison. You'd also been seeing Serena a few times. Now Marion is dead and Serena is missing. Drat it, Edison I believe . . ."

HE STOPPED as there was a knock on the door and Miss Judson, neat and crisp in white uniform, elderly and dignified, came in.

"We'll just let Miss Judson take you into the X-ray room and prepare you, Dudley." He told Miss Judson, "Mr. Briggs is to have the barium X-rays of the gastro-intestinal tract. Get him ready and give him the barium meal. I won't use the fluoroscope."

While the smiling Miss Judson led the scowling Dudley Briggs out, Pauline watched Dr. Edison's neck muscles move rapidly, the veins standing out. The remark of Dudley's had caused his face to get fiery red.

After Dudley had gone from the room, Edison smiled at Pauline. "Giving you much trouble?"

She sighed. "It was easier when Marion was around."

"Does he keep mentioning . . .?"

She nodded. "He hasn't let me forget my father for one moment since I came back from Europe. I can't figure him out." She could, though, even if she couldn't tell Edison about it. She could well imagine Dr. Edison's reaction if he should learn that actually she was a physician with no legal right to be one.

Edison said, "How are you doing?"

"Are you joking, Burt?" She wished he would stop touching every little object on the desk, the pen, the pencil, the blotters, pushing the pen this way, then that way, then back again.

"Human nature," Edison said, philosophically. "A woman doctor is all right as long as she's homely and elderly. But if she's young and pretty . . ." He shrugged.

"The world," he went on, "has the idea that pretty women are for romance and housekeeping and having babies. A man's dreams are usually of coming home to his wife . . . inevitably beautiful, inevitably pregnant . . ." His voice had choked up slightly, and Pauline knew he probably was reminded of his own dreams with Marion Hillman.

She said, a little more kindly, "You loved her very much, didn't you?"

He nodded slowly. "But I also learned to hate her, Pauline. To sell herself to an old man like your uncle. It's indecent. She was wicked, wicked and vicious." Suddenly, he sat up straight and seemed to be trying to shake off the feeling.

"That's the way it is," he finished, talking about Pauline again. "Nobody wants to know that you were top honor graduate at Columbia, that you know

your medicine backwards. But don't give up. You've put your whole life into it." This last sentence sounded to Pauline as holding the trace of a subtle rebuke.

"I . . . I won't quit," she said and she thought of Roff.

They sat there and discussed matters of medicine and general topics for another five minutes, and it was at this point that the door flew open and Miss Judson ran in, white faced, a look of terror in her eyes.

"Dr. Edison, please *hurry*. Mr. Briggs is having a heart attack in the X-ray room!" she cried, panting for breath.

"My God!" Pauline gasped and she jumped up, almost tripping in her haste. "And we didn't *believe him!*" Edison had already gone through the door, after Miss Judson, and she followed them.

DUDLEY BRIGGS lay on the tile floor, next to the black X-ray table. He was without shirt and his chest and face were red as fire. His eyes rolled back into his head and he was gasping for air, his chest rising and falling much too rapidly.

Edison snapped, "Help me get him on the table." The three of them managed it, and then Pauline had her fingers on his pulse and was scrutinizing her watch.

"One hundred and fifty," she announced, in a weak voice. "Oh God!"

"Not good," said Edison. "Miss Judson, bring me the manometer and prepare a long hyperdermic with adrenalin, and a short hypo with digitalis."

Miss Judson flew out of the room.

Pauline's face was set and she felt as though there were butterflies in her stomach. She was aware that now, in this crisis, she had lost her medical ability to remain calm in the face of her own involvement with the patient. Burton Edison, she noted with a new respect for him, had, on the contrary, lost all his nervousness and was handling the situation with a coolness and determination she had never seen in him.

"It looks bad, Pauline," he said. "You can prepare for the worst."

Miss Judson barged back into the room, handed him the blood pressure machine, and Edison strapped the manometer around Dudley's arm and forced air into the machine and applied the stethoscope to the inside bend of the elbow.

"Two hundred and sixty," he told Pauline. Then to Miss Judson, "What happened?"

"I had him take his shirt off. Then I mixed the barium sulfate meal and gave it to him to drink. He drank the two glasses full and liked it. He even remarked it tasted like a chocolate malted. Then I went into the dark room to fix the X-ray plates and I heard a loud thud. I came out to look and found him on the floor."

"All right, get the hyperdermics. Then we'll just have to wait and see. He may pull out of it." And now, Pauline noticed, with a fear gripping her heart, there was a line of humor on Edison's lips.

Dudley Briggs turned his head in the struggle for air and his eyes fell on Pauline. There was a look of bewilderment in them, and a look of pleading. Help me, Pauline," those eyes seemed to say to her, "help me because I do not know why this is happening." But the only sound that came out of his mouth was a rasp and a gurgling sound.

Pauline could endure it no longer. She turned and fled from the room.

CHAPTER VII

SERENA CHALMERS slept past the hour for lunch and Cornell was get-

ting hungry. He tip-toed to the bedroom and peeked in and saw she was sleeping soundly.

He went into the kitchen and began making himself some fried eggs, and it annoyed him to be doing it. The least she *could* do, he thought, is not indulge herself in sleep so much and that lunch. . . . He stopped and grinned at himself. A well -integrated person, he realized he was being subjective and childish.

The bell rang and he turned off the gas jets and went to open the door.

The caller was a tall, thin man, with a long homely face, wearing thick glasses, neatly dressed in a tan tropical suit, and sporting a large brown mustache. Instantly, Cornell's mind referred back to that part of Serena's dream that went, "I put them in a small coffin and a man wearing *thick glasses* came and took them out . . ." The italics were his own mental emphasis.

"Dr. Cornell?" asked the man.

"Yes."

"I'm Dr. Burton Edison. Can you spare me a moment?"

Cornell noticed the man's fingers were in constant play, along the sides of his trousers, the hem of his jacket, the lapels.

Cornell stepped aside.

"Of course. Come in." You, Cornell thought to himself, are a man I would very much like to see. You are the doctor treating Dudley and so you fit into the family sphere of activity; you are also included quite strongly in Serena's dream and I would like to know just why.

In the consultation room, Edison scaled his hat onto the couch with a flip and sat down in the easy chair opposite the desk. He lit a cigarette hastily and didn't offer one to Cornell.

"I recall Dudley Briggs mentioning your name to me yesterday," said Cornell. "In connection with x-rays you were to take this morning."

Edison gave his head an agonized nod and Cornell caught the look of strain across the man's forehead. To read any emotion in Edison's distorted eyes was an impossibility.

"Quite right, quite right," Edison said hastily, clipping his words like machine-gun fire. "Dudley mentioned your name to me, too. That's why I'm here. Unfortunately, Dudley never took those x-rays. Unfortunately."

"Why not? He was anxious to."

Edison let go a loud sigh and his chest heaved. "Dudley's dead. Dead," he repeated, needlessly.

Cornell put his elbows on the desk, then made a pyramid of his fingers and peered through the resulting tunnel at Dr. Edison.

"Heart failure," Edison said.

CORNELL tried to remain calm, at least externally. "That was sudden. Both you and Pauline—Dr. Setton—had been rigid in insisting his heart was not failing."

"That's it," said Edison in his clipped manner of speaking. "It looked like heart failure. Blood pressure way up, pulse exceedingly fast. I administered digitalis and adrenalin. To no avail. No avail at all."

"Why your anxiety?"

Edison sat up straight in his seat, his eyes glaring at Cornell. "Look here," he said firmly. "I'm being framed . . . to use a popular expression everybody understands. And I don't like it. Not a bit!"

"Framed?"

"Absolutely, I tell you. Dudley Briggs came into my office an arthritic case with an anxiety complex and extreme hypochondria. There had been no evidence of heart trouble and he didn't *look* like a heart case. You know

what I mean. A doctor can judge conditions by looks. Damn well can." This speech took no more than five seconds, so rapidly was it shot out.

"Yes," was all Cornell said.

"Dudley died of heart failure, all right. That blood pressure. The myocardial stimulation. Then the hemmorrhage. I admit it. Damn it, we all die of heart failure," Edison raised his voice.

"Then why . . . ?"

"Poison. There's hundreds of drugs that will cause death to similate actual heart failure. Hundreds."

Cornell broke up the pyramid of fingers and folded his arms across his lean stomach.

"Why come to me?" he said.

"I can't go to the police. Much as I want to. You seem to be the middle line and Dudley had great faith in you. You seem to have been pushing the case of Marion Hillman around to suit yourself."

Cornell felt an inner spark of satisfaction. Was that the rumor going around, that he was pushing the case to suit himself?

But he said, "Hardly."

"Well, you're in it, more or less in an *un*official capacity. Don't deny it," Edison scowled. He didn't give Cornell a chance to reply but went on with his machine-gun utterances:

"I'm not going to take this sitting down, Cornell. Not one damn bit." His hands fluttered somewhere at the hem of his jacket. "Nobody handed me my career on a silver platter. I worked hard. My parents worked hard to help me out. I came out of the dregs of this City and succeeded. I wouldn't know the cultural Boston society from a hole in the wall."

"When you referred to careers on a silver platter, did you mean me?"

"Frankly, yes," Edison said stubbornly. "I've read your background in a medical journal. You can't deny you had it pretty easy. Pretty easy, man."

"I won't deny it," Cornell said, wearily. He was used to this kind of resentment against his background.

EDISON was biting the inside of his lip, regarding the psychiatrist. The light reflected weirdly off his thick lenses.

"Getting back to Dudley's death," he said finally, "I've given the contents of the barium sulfate meal to a chemist for analysis. I only kept one large can of it at a time. I don't do too many Roentgen examinations. Not many."

"An autopsy can settle the question."

"Well, see here. If my fears are groundless that would stir up an unnecessary police investigation. Scandal would be directed to my office, indicating a mistake was made by me, or by my technician."

"We're not down to fundamentals, Edison," Cornell said, a new hardness in his voice. "First, why didn't you sign the death certificate yourself, calling it heart failure? There would be no questions. You'd be in the clear."

"Two reasons," said Edison promptly. "Number one is you. You wouldn't let it go at that, not after the murder of Marion Hillman. Am I right?" He didn't let Cornell answer, but hurried on:

"Of course I'm right. Point number two: if it was intended as a frame-up, then the person responsible for the act wouldn't let it go as just a normal death. He, or she, would have defeated his intended purpose. He would stir up the details. Then, there's still another reason."

"Yes," said Cornell, finding himself being convinced by this rapid, nervous talker. "Probably many more reasons."

"It's Pauline."

"Dr. Setton?"

"She came with her uncle. She had motive to kill your uncle."

Cornell said nothing, waited.

"He was pressing her too hard. He made repetitious reference to her father, who had committed suicide. She hated Marion Hillman, who was going to marry Dudley, and Pauline had just been included as equal heir with Richard, her cousin."

"I knew about that," said Cornell.

"Also, she was the only one who could have gotten into my office and put the poison in the barium can. She had a key to my office, which I gave her. I have always left Pauline in charge of my office when I was on vacation or out of town. Now, I'm *fond* of Pauline. Very fond." A smile formed on his lips. "I wouldn't want to see her get into any trouble until I was absolutely sure."

"What trouble?"

"She signed the death certificate herself. She was most anxious to let it go as heart failure. When I refused to make out the death certificate, she did it herself. She has already taken the body to the undertaker's for burial day after tomorrow."

Abruptly, Cornell said, "I'll do what I can."

Edison stood up and retrieved his hat from the couch, then stood in the center of the room looking at Cornell.

"Without the police?" he said.

CORNELL thought of Serena sleeping in his bedroom. "Yes," he sighed, "definitely *without* the police." A thought occurred to him and he said, "Incidentally, how do you suppose the English girl, Serena, fits into the whole set-up?"

"I didn't know Serena very well," said Edison, twirling his hat around on one finger. "I saw her often enough, but I could never fathom her. Queer girl. Very queer. They find out where she is?"

Cornell shook his head.

Edison shrugged. "Well, that's not my affair." He walked across the room, was about to pass through the door when he stopped and turned around to look at Cornell.

"I might as well tell you one thing," he said. "It's going to reach you anyway. I was in love with Marion Hillman. Furiously in love. I can't find a word strong enough to indicate how much I loved her. She was going to marry me. Oh, not for love," he smiled. "You can see I'm no Don Juan."

"Yes," said Cornell, frankly.

Edison quickened his speech still more.

"I didn't care about her not loving me. But Dudley broke it up. He offered her more money and she was a lousy tramp. She sold to the highest bidder. I grew to hate her, and to hate Dudley. I hated both of them enough for murder, if I was the murdering kind. I hated Marion Hillman so much I probably projected a lot of that hate onto Dudley and rationalized to myself that I hated him because he had the money to buy the woman I loved. I'm a jerk. I know it. But there it is. No matter the reason, the hate was there. Check through your Freudian bible and build a case against me." With which the tall, lanky physician walked out.

SERENA stood framed in the doorway, faint lines of sleep around her eyes.

"I was up, Alex," she said. "I heard what he said."

"Does it mean anything to you?"

"Nothing."

"Can you think of anything in connection with your having had a crush on Dr. Edison?"

"He's . . . he . . . I h a t e d the sound of his voice."

"Why?"

"He . . . he sounded so ugly," and her gray eyes glared at Cornell, as though he were, in some way, responsible for Edison being ugly.

"He wears thick glasses," said Cornell. "Tall and lanky, with a long nose and a heavy brown mustache. Is he the ugly man in your dream?"

"I don't know, Alex." She came into the room, and stood near the desk, looking down at him.

"Never mind," he said, and he was irritable.

She cocked her head slightly at him. "Please don't be angry, Alex. I wish I could help you more. I'm trying so very hard." The bubbles came into her voice again, and she walked to the chair and sat down.

"Don't be silly," Cornell said, beginning to r e g r e t his irritability. "You're doing fine. And I don't want you to force it. It has to come gradually."

He got up to light the cigarette she had taken from the end table. She inhaled the smoke and blew it toward the ceiling and watched it float up there. "Do you often wonder, Alex, how all this . . . is going to turn out?"

He went back to the desk and his eyes watched the long graceful curve from the vale between her breasts to the tip of her rounded chin.

"No," he said, not smiling. "As far as I'm concerned it *must* turn out only one way. In *my* favor. By Jove, there is no compromise now."

"Alex," she said softly, still watching the smoke thinning out near the ceiling.

He waited.

"I don't know my . . . past, except for what you have found out about it. I know only a lot of facts that could easily apply to some other person. Serena Chalmers is really a stranger to me. I am told I am Serena, that I come from London, England, that I came here to spend the summer with a girl I went to medical school with."

Her head came down, and the silver flecks in her eyes gave him that same feeling of conflict concerning her he had experienced at the time of their first meeting.

"What I mean to say is that none of those facts exist for me. They mean nothing to me. All I know now is my own feelings, one-sided emotions. Only what is happening to me now."

"That's a natural reaction for your condition."

"The past doesn't count—no matter what my involvements were."

Apprehension shot through Cornell. "Serena, just what are you trying to say?"

"I love you, Alex," and she looked at him and her eyes filled with tears.

CHAPTER VIII

PAULINE finished her dressing in a hurry, still undecided about Roff. Earlier, when she had come back from the undertaker's, she thought she had settled the issue by promising herself not to meet him—to let him go on wondering about her, always loving her, always having that clean taste in his mind when he thought of her.

She had let her hair down, combed it out full, brushing it ruthlessly until the red became tinted with gold and it glowed and vibrated. She dabbed rouge onto both cheeks, inexperiencedly in round circles, and applied an orange-colored lipstick to her mouth. That was easy; all she had to do was follow the full graceful curves of her lips.

She put on a light green spun-rayon dress that came low on the neck. She didn't put on her glasses. Her view

of the distances would be hazy, without them, but she could manage. Then she looked at her image in the full-length mirror, at the new face, the new figure, and a thrill ran through her.

"You're a woman!" she said, amazed.

The phone rang and she hurriedly picked up the receiver of the extension in her bedroom.

"Oh . . ." she said into it after listening a moment. "Dr. Cornell."

"I want to express my regrets at your uncle's death," Cornell told her. "I rather liked the old boy."

His voice bit into her; she could visualize his boyish face for a man of his age; the dark eyes that always looked so smug and knowing, the tan hair a piece of which always hung down over his forehead. But the voice, with its low hypnotic quality, filled her with resentment.

"Thank you," she said, and a chill went through her.

"Dr. Edison was alarmed at your hasty diagnosis of heart failure and your hasty signing of the death certificate."

"Indeed? I assure you I acted to the best of my ability as a medical practitioner."

"Oh," Cornell's voice was apologetic, "you're clear on that. It's just that Edison was worried that you might be the one trying to throw suspicion on him for the death of your uncle."

"That's absurd . . ." Her throat was tightening up again and she couldn't swallow.

"He feels that way in view of the fact that you were the only one who had a key to his office . . . The knife that killed Marion belonged to you. The truth is, you *did* have ample motive."

"I . . . I don't feel well, Dr. Cornell. Do you mind . . . ?"

There was amusement in his voice now, Pauline felt. He said, "Of course," and hung up.

Pauline sat down in a chair and tried to compose herself. What was she to do? Where was the solution to this? No, she wouldn't meet Roff. Not now. Not . . .

"But why not?" she said, half aloud. Indeed, she was entitled to that. Just to see him once more. Get him to understand that she couldn't see him again. Tell him . . . tell him anything, that she was going away, that she didn't love him . . .

My God! she thought. Not love Roff? How very, very absurd. She stood up, glanced at herself in the mirror, and went downstairs.

RICHARD spotted her from the open door to the library and came out. His face was slightly red and he'd been drinking. It was with alarm that Pauline had observed his drinking to become more and more frequent ever since coming home from the army.

"Holy smokes!" he exclaimed, staring at her. He stood there swaying slightly on his feet, shaking his head in utter amazement. "Hubba-hubba," he added finally. "What happened to you?"

She pretended indifference. "Nothing," she said.

He grinned from the side of his mouth, distorting his handsome face. "Maybe my lecture yesterday morning did the trick."

"Indeed, I'm quite sure it didn't."

"Then it's a man," he said, profoundly. He waved his hands in the air. "Pauline's got a man. Pauline's in love," he cried demonstratively. "C'mon. Confess. Who's the cluck?"

"You're acting quite idiotic, Richard." She turned away from him and added, "You don't seem greatly upset over Uncle Dudley's death," she admonished.

"Nor do you," he shot back.

"But Uncle D u d l e y worshipped you . . ." She was going to add more but didn't. Dudley was always afraid of Richard, she knew that. Suppose Dr. Edison had been right? Suppose Dudley didn't die of normal heart failure. Suppose Richard. . . . She shivered and glanced quickly at her cousin, and she knew then she could never feel the same toward him, ever.

Richard's only comment had been, "Bah!" and then the chimes of the front door sounded.

"That's Edna-Anne," Richard said, grimacing distastefully. "I do think I will send her on her merry way."

"Richard, p l e a s e," Pauline said. "Don't be cruel to her. Do it gradually. For my sake, Richard," she pleaded.

He looked at her intently. "You could always whirl me around your little finger, couldn't you? Even when we were children I can remember your getting me to do things I never wanted to. But I don't like it now, Pauline. Be careful."

The chimes sounded again and he stopped talking, glanced at his cousin once, and went across the marble-floor of the foyer to open the door.

Edna-Anne Knight was a woman of thirty-six or -seven, stocky in proportions, w i t h sandy-colored hair that looked as lifeless as her pale, plain face. The only sign of vitality was in her blue eyes, which jumped nervously, observing everything. She smelled, Pauline thought, of too much perfume.

"Hello," Edna-Anne said, in a husky voice. She nodded to Pauline and looked up at Richard, adoringly.

"Hello, Edna," Pauline said. "Nice to see you again." She had never cared one way or another about Edna-Anne. Indeed, prior to her meeting Roff, she had held the weak Edna-Anne in some contempt. She couldn't see any woman throwing herself so shamelessly at any man. She had discovered her compassion for Edna-Anne, only after meeting Roff, only after she herself had felt the meaning of loving a person very much.

Richard tried vainly to affect a smile for his fiancee, but failed. "Come, come," he said to Edna-Anne. He looked at Pauline and made a wry, annoyed face, which he didn't attempt to conceal from Edna-Anne.

Pauline excused herself and went out.

ROFF was standing, as usual, in front of the monkey cage at the Central Park Zoo, when Pauline arrived. She could see him in the distance, vaguely, in blurred outline, and as she approached her heart began to beat faster and her mouth felt dry and sticky, and she feared her shaking knees would never carry her over to him.

Nearer, his image became clearer to her, like a motion picture camera being focused for sharpness of detail. He saw her and smiled. He was tall and blond—very blond—broadshouldered and he had green eyes. It was into these green eyes she stared as he took her hand and led her away from the monkey cage, to a bench partially obscured between two trees.

They sat down and before she could say anything, he kissed her and all the fright and fear went out of her.

He pushed her away and stared at her. "What did you do to yourself? You're positively glamorous." His voice was deep and rich.

"Fixed up a bit."

"I almost didn't recognize you." He peered more closely into her face. "Are those lines of worry under your eyes deeper today, or is it the shadow of the trees?"

"Don't be silly, Roff."

"But they are." His wide, clean shaven face looked worried. "I can

tell. Don't you know there is a rapport between two people in love?"

"Yes, I know it," she said. Her eyes couldn't drink in his face fast enough. The bushy blond eyebrows; the darker blond eyelashes. The round jaw, a fresh cut on it from shaving.

"Tell me, darling. Tell me what's troubling you."

"Nothing."

He made a clicking noise with his tongue to indicate exasperation. "Do I look like an idiot? All I know is your first name. You haven't let me come to your home. Am I supposed to think everything is normal under those conditions?"

"Roff, please . . ."

"Why are you so afraid of my mother, and my father? They won't bite you? Because Pop is a Senator?"

Bite her? Oh, no. Mr. and Mrs. John Inglewood would simply throw her out on her ear if they knew she was the daughter of a man who had committed suicide, if they knew she was legally not entitled to practice medicine, as she was doing. And now this murder . . . And she the most outstanding suspect. It wasn't a movie; she wasn't proved innocent because she was most suspected.

"I know it," she said.

"Well, do you know what I did last night?"

Fearfully, "No."

Proudly, "Last night I grabbed myself by the collar and yanked myself to a mirror and said to my image, 'Roff Inglewood, you're a sissy!' "

She laughed out loud. It was so good to laugh. Roff leaned over and stopped her with a kiss, then sat back again.

"Know why I'm a sissy, eh?" he said, nonchalantly.

"No."

"Because if I were a man I'd find out what's troubling you and help you. I'd not listen to you, seeing you on the sly, not meeting your family. But mainly I'd resent not being allowed to help you. Don't you realize, darling, I don't care *what* the trouble is? I love you. Let me pitch in and help you."

"Roff, if you snooped, I'd . . ." The fear rose in her again. This was so important to her. Maybe not to others, but to her it was the most important decision of her life.

Roff sighed, wearily. "Don't worry. I'll keep up my end of the bargain. I won't try to find out who you are, or what you are, until you're ready to tell me yourself. Even though I know it's all ridiculous and that you're being very silly."

"Perhaps soon . . ." she promised vaguely. Gone were all her thoughts of not seeing him again, of ending it all this day. She wasn't strong enough to even bear the thought of it now. "I love you very much, Roff," she said.

His embrace made the blood rush through her veins, fired her imagination. She pulled away and stood up. "I must be going, dear."

He frowned his disappointment. "So soon? But I'll see you tomorrow, same time?"

"Yes, of course." She walked away, without looking back at him.

ROFF INGLEWOOD sat there in the heat of the hot afternoon sun, absorbed deep in thought, his blond handsome face set and looking far from happy.

A short, fat man, wearing a soiled white tropical suit, sat down next to him.

"Blimey, Guv'nor, it's hot, ain't it?" he said, lighting a cigarette.

Roff cast him a glance and turned his eyes away. "Yup," he said, annoyed. He was bent over, watching the toe of his shoe doodling in the sun-dried dirt.

"She's a bit of all right, your lady friend," Bunny Craig said, grinning.

"Uh-huh," said Roff, then he realized what the man had said and he turned to him and scowled.

Bunny Craig looked nonplussed.

"An' 'ow would you like to know about the lady, Mr. Inglewood? Eh, now?"

Something tightened inside Roff. Something he did not like. It was curiosity.

"How the devil do you know my name?" he snapped.

"O, I 'ave information, I 'ave, Guv'nor. I know Pauline Setton well enough. Knew 'er in London, too."

"London? Pauline's been in London?" Then it struck him that he now knew her last name. Setton. Setton. It buzzed around in his brain. He knew that name, or had seen it someplace, recently.

"Sure nuff, Guv'nor," Craig said. "When she was studyin' to be a doctor."

"Pauline . . . a doctor?" Roff repeated. He was dazed, the blows coming fast—but aware that he was breaking his vow to Pauline. He shouldn't be hearing this. He shouldn't want to hear it. But he did.

Bunny Craig seemed to sense his vantage position, and he added quickly:

"Now, that's just dribblets, Guv'nor. There's big information I 'ave . . . For," he made it explicit, "*sale,* o' course."

"Big information? Is there any?" Roff was trying to break through the cloud that had settled over his mind. The cockney's words were sinking in, all right, but none of them would hold still long enough so that he could get the proper perspective of their meaning.

"Are you kiddin', Guv'nor? I'll say there is. For your own good you should know about P. August Setton, M.D., I'm tellin' you."

The cloud began to lift from his brain.

"Have you been blackmailing Pauline?" He said it stiffly, his face showing his anger.

" 'Ere, now, don't get your dander up. I 'ave to live, same as you, Guv'nor . . . Now the point is, she has got to raise five thousand for me, but I 'ave a mind she won't be able to. So I figure you ought to be willin' to pay ten thousand for 'er five, I'll thank you very much."

"Why, you fat skunk!" Roff growled.

Bunny Craig got up and inched away from the big man.

"Do you think I'd give you one cent to tell me about Pauline?" Roff cried. "I warn you to keep away from her. I'll break you neck, you little fat pig. I swear I will!"

"That so, Mister Inglewood?" Craig defied him, keeping a respectful distance away, his body half turned to run for it. "And you wait and see if you won't pay." He inched back another foot. "An' for nothin' let me tell you that Dr. Setton's father was plain nuts, 'e was. Took a car ride with 'is wife and rammed them both into a stone wall. 'Ow do you like that, Mister Inglewood?"

Craig turned and half ran away from Roff, who had gotten to his feet and was staring after the fat cockney. Suddenly he remembered where he'd seen the name Setton. It was yesterday. In the newspapers, in connection with some murder case.

There are times, he thought grimly and with determination, when a promise *has* to be broken.

CHAPTER IX

FOR the first time in his life, Alexander Cornell met up with physical violence and it was a painful experience

for him.

It had come time for lunch and he and Serena had found a dislike for eating bacon and eggs again and there was nothing else available in the closets.

"I'll go out," said Cornell, "and try to wrangle a steak from the butcher."

"Oh, good," Serena cried, enthusiastically.

The butcher store was crowded with shoving women, and two or three times Cornell was willing to settle for the bacon and eggs again, but he would remember Serena's show of delight at the thought of a steak, and he determined to see it through.

When it came his turn, he managed to get two rib steaks the butcher had been hiding under the counter. Cornell was certain that it had been sheer pity on the part of the butcher, watching him struggle amidst the crowd of women, that had decided him to part with the steaks. The women groaned when they saw it, and began belaboring the butcher with numerous epithets.

On the street, the two steaks clutched tightly under his arm, Cornell was wringing wet from perspiration. The transaction had taken forty minutes to accomplish and despite the heat he was ravenous.

In the lobby, he noticed he had failed to close his door tightly. He strode in, quickly, to announce to Serena the capture of the prizes, when it happened.

He sensed, after the first two steps, that somebody was behind the door. His mind and body reflexes completely caught off guard, and completely inexperienced, made a clumsy attempt to whirl around and ascertain his conviction of the proximity of an intruder.

But it was too late. An object crashed down on the side of his head before he could see who it was. A roar exploded in his brain, and he was conscious for a moment of a movement of falling into space, of red and yellow fire bursting before his eyes. Then darkness swooped down over him, weighting him to the floor.

HIS first sensation was of a sticking pain across the right temple, then of coldness on his forehead. The coldness felt good. He opened his eyes. The man bending over him wore a white uniform and was young. In his hand was a small curved needle, which Cornell recognized as a suturing needle. He was aware that he was still in his office, that he was on the couch. He felt fully aware of his surroundings and of what had happened.

"How many?" he asked.

"Three," the young doctor said. Cornell could see the name of a hospital written on his sleeve. Somebody had called an ambulance for him. A wave of panic swept through him as he thought of Serena. Had the person who hit him been after Serena? Was she still here?

"Lucky there is no skull fracture," the intern said, "it was a hard blow with a wooden instrument. I've taken out a few splinters." He threaded the needle. "Last one, now."

Cornell closed his eyes, felt the sharp stick of the needle passing through his flesh, then opened his eyes. The intern made the knot, painted the wound with iodine, stuck a piece of adhesive tape over it, and stood up.

"Okay, now," he announced. He grinned. "You'll admit that medical men *do* serve a purpose, eh? You'd never get that cut together with psychoanalysis."

"I've never tried it or denied the worth of medical men," Cornell said.

"Well, take it easy for awhile." The intern looked puzzled.

"Thanks," Cornell said. "How did you get here?"

"A neighbor phoned." He packed his bag and left.

Cornell got up and his knees felt weak, weak at the fear he would not find Serena in her room. He walked to the bedroom, gripping the walls on the way. He was having a peculiar reaction to all this. He had never encountered physical violence in his life, and somehow it had been a missing item. He found, now, that the anxiety of physical encounter had been greater than the actuality. He felt fullfilled and angry and bewildered.

She was in her room, huddled in a corner. She saw him come in and she sobbed through her t e a r s, "Oh, Alex . . ."

He smiled. "It's all right, Serena." He came in and sat down on the bed. "This is a new one for me. What happened when I was gone?"

"I never want to live through a time like that again, Alex." She dabbed her eyes with a handkerchief—one of his, he noticed—and he could see her hands were shaking.

"Ten minutes after you left I heard the door open. Didn't you lock it?"

"I must have failed to catch the snap in my haste."

"I thought it was you and almost went to meet you, but when you didn't call I became scared. I waited here and waited and then I knew it wasn't you. I didn't know what to do. I . . ."

"Control yourself. It wasn't your fault." Gingerly he touched the adhesive tape on his right temple.

"I waited, so afraid. I wanted to run out and see who it was, to warn you . . . then I remembered you said under no conditions to endanger our set-up here. Oh, Alex, I waited here a whole half hour, then I heard you come in and I heard the blow, then somebody ran out and slammed the door. I couldn't stand it. I went into the hallway and saw you on the floor, bleeding and unconscious. I phoned the hospital and said I was a neighbor and I opened the front door to show that I could have seen you lying there."

"All right," said Cornell. "It's happened. At least he didn't see you here. What we know, now, is that some where along the line I have put some one at the point where he has to attack. Speaking as an amateur detective . . ." he touched his temple again and smiled, "I think that's a good sign."

She gave a shivery sigh. "I'm so glad you're all right. I don't know what I'd do without you . . ."

The doorbell rang and they looked at each other. Cornell shrugged and stood up. His head throbbed, but his knees felt stronger.

IT WAS the D.A. standing there, a huge, majestic figure of a man, puffing on a cigar, resembling Wendell Willkie with more than a casual likeness. Cornell's mind jumped to conclusions and his knees became weak again.

"What happened to you?" the D.A. boomed, looking at the tape across his special appointee's forehead.

"I cut it on the edge of the medicine cabinet in the bathroom," Cornell lied glibly. He sat down behind his desk and the D.A. sank into the easy chair.

"You were decent about that thing, Chief," Cornell said. Then his eye caught the package containing the two steaks. It was on the end table, next to the chair the D.A. was sitting in. Cornell tried not to look at it. The D.A. would know he never bought two steaks to keep in the icebox; the D.A. knew his life as a bachelor and that excepting breakfast he ate his meals out.

The D.A. puffed on his cigar and shrugged it off. "I don't care, just as long as the Homicide Squad doesn't catch you at something . . ." he smiled

knowingly ". . . something that would discredit our office. Get me?"

"Got you," said Cornell. For a second he amused himself with the thought of what the D.A.'s reaction would be if Serena should suddenly walk into the room.

"Anything on this Serena Chalmers?" Cornell asked.

"Sands went through her room. Nothing. Few articles of clothing. Evidently, she didn't expect to be away . . . Dammit, Alex, the thing keeps annoying me. *You.* How did you know the girl was a nurse? It's not like you. Alexander Cornell is not the trouble-shooting, adventurous type."

Cornell resented this. He wouldn't have resented it last week, or at any other time in his life. Today, though, he resented it, and made a strong effort to hide the resentment.

"Very simply," Cornell replied, easily. "I saw the identification bracelet and checked on it."

"In the middle of the night?"

"The next morning."

"How did you check?" The D.A.'s rich voice droned. Cornell was getting dizzy and he had no intention of putting up with the D.A.'s cross examination. He was certain to slip up.

"Chief, you sound like you're asking for my resignation."

"To hell with that, Alex. But this thing is serious. There's too much publicity in the matter and I'm on the spot." He took the cigar from his mouth and dumped the ashes in the tray. His eyes fell on the package of the two steaks and he touched it with his hand, while Cornell held his breath. Then the D.A. ignored it and turned his eyes back to Cornell.

"I still say it's very peculiar," he went on. "You're a man with a cultural background. You're an accomplished psychiatrist. You've achieved outstanding success and you've been valuable to me on cases wherein I could use you as an expert witness. You're four heads above the average psychiatrist because y o u don't go around sprouting anti-social ideas. But, confound it man, don't start getting adventurous at your age in life. You haven't the stamina for it."

"If . . ." Cornell tried to make it sound very impressive ". . . if I can have a *free* hand, I think I can provide you with some very worthwhile evidence for prosecution in court."

"For God's sake, let me out here," the D.A. boomed. "Alex, what the *hell* are you doing with your spare time?"

FEELING himself being dragged in deeper and deeper, Cornell felt it appropriate and advisable to provide the D.A. with other matters for thought.

"Dudley Briggs is the man Marion Hillman worked for and was going to marry," he began.

The D.A. eyed him curiously, his hand resting on the package with the steaks.

"Dudley Briggs is dead," he finished.

The D.A. didn't do anything except wait.

"He died this morning of heart failure in the office of Dr. Burton Edison. Dr. Edison came to me soon after the death, greatly agitated that somebody was trying to frame him for the old man's death. Dudley was having stomach x-rays taken and he died shortly after drinking the barium meal used for such x-rays. Dr. Edison is afraid poison might have been put into the barium sulfate container. He's having it analyzed now, which wouldn't be too conclusive."

The D.A. nodded. "The poison may only be in Dudley Briggs, and not in the barium container."

"Exactly."

"Who signed the death certificate?"

"His niece, Pauline Setton."

"This is going to be tough to arrange. The minute you hear from Edison about the chemist's report, phone me. Either way, whether there's poison in it or not I'll phone the Medical Examiner and ask for an autopsy. If he refuses, I'll have my own medical assistant do it, but you know how touchy the city M.E. is."

"That would be best. I'll let you know as soon as possible." Cornell sighed with relief.

The D.A. got up and put on his Panama hat. "What the hell's in that package?" he said.

Cornell's heart sank. "Oh, stockings I bought this morning."

The D.A. shook his head with exasperation. "Pretty soggy stockings," and he left, leaving Cornell with a violent headache and a deep sense of frustration.

He went to the bedroom door and knocked, then called for Serena to come out.

"I need a drink," he told her. "Come into the kitchen." He produced a bottle of Irish Whiskey, eleven year old stock, which he saved for an occasional nip. Serena drank with him.

The smooth blend perked him up and he had another one. His head still throbbed.

"Are you up to another session, Serena?" he said. "The pressure is really on, now, from *every* angle." He touched the adhesive tape across his temple.

She giggled slightly. "I heard what he said about you not being the adventurous type."

Cornell grinned back at her. "It's never too late to learn."

THEY went back into the consultation room and Serena assumed her place on the couch while Cornell dimmed the lights. When he was ready, he said:

"Serena, I've explained amnesia to you and dreams. You were extremely adept at understanding the rudiments. Your cooperation I must grade A plus."

"I'm very glad you are pleased, Alex."

"Thing is, there remains one more thing to be explained to you," he added.

She kept her eyes closed.

"As a general rule, all patients fall in love with their analyst."

"Yes," she said softly, "I rather thought that was what you were leading up to."

"It's called the phenomena of transference. A female patient transfers to the Analyst all her repressed feeling she's had toward her father, brother, mother, and so on. The Analyst is symbolic of unrepressed love. It's a phenomena without an exact identification, but still it exists very definitely."

"I'm sorry you are upset over it. I know you couldn't possibly fall in love with a . . ."

"Nonsense," he cut in. "I feel strongly toward you, but I want you to understand exactly what is at the basis of such a feeling. The analyst adopts a protective attitude toward his patients —especially toward a patient like yourself. I have a great desire to protect you."

"Thank you," she said, turning her head to face the wall, and she sounded peeved.

Cornell ignored her attitude. As a detective and an adventurer, he admitted, grudgingly, he was an amateur. As a psychoanalyst, he was on firm ground, confident, experienced. And who was there to deny that these sorties into the hidden recesses of the mind was not more adventurous, more fascinating, more filled with mystery, than any other type of adventure?

"Let's get on," he said. "The next passage I have written down reads: 'There was an airplane in the distance and the pilot was chasing the girl who was bleeding.'"

Silence.

"What are your thoughts?" Cornell prodded gently.

"I have none."

"We have established the fact that the bleeding girl is Marion Hillman, the murder victim," Cornell reminded her.

"Yes," she said. She straightened her head on the pillow.

"Who is the pilot?"

"I don't know."

"What do you see?"

"A pair of thick glasses."

"Is it Dr. Edison?"

"There is no human form. Just the thick glasses, with human eyes behind it, glaring at me."

"Is Dr. Edison chasing Marion Hillman?"

SILENCE. . . . Heavy silence that seemed to float on the humid air. The atmosphere, physically and spiritually, was heavy, muggy. From the alley came the *whirrrr* of the ventilator system. Cornell's head ached and when he frowned the sutures in his temple pulled and pained.

"Why is Dr. Edison chasing Marion Hillman," he kept on. "To kill her? To plunge a leather-handled knife into her throat?"

"Oh God! I don't know."

"The airplane and the pilot suggests Richard Briggs, rather than Dr. Edison, since Richard had been in the airforce. The mind *would* symbolize him that way."

"Well, no . . ." said Serena, turning her head to look at him. Glints of silver in her wide eyes; small jaw set.

"Why not?"

"It doesn't sound right to me. When you say it, the pair of eyeglasses becomes larger and thicker."

The bell rang. They remained still for a brief moment, then Cornell jumped up and said hastily, "Quick, into the bedroom." He turned on the lights, while Serena disappeared from the room. Then he went to answer the door.

It was Dr. Burton Edison, and he looked none too happy, his face red and dripping sweat, his thick glasses smoked from the heat of his perspiration.

"Damn this heat. Damn it," Edison swore, following Cornell into his office. "I rushed over as soon as I received the chemist's report."

"What's the verdict?"

Edison scaled his hat onto the couch and plopped down into the easy chair, fanning himself with his handkerchief.

"Murder," he said. "There was enough barium chloride mixed in the barium sulfate container to kill a dozen Dudley Briggs. A fistfull of the stuff."

"Barium chloride. That *is* powerful stuff," said Cornell, watching Edison's rapid movements, his nervous reactions.

"I looked it up," Edison said. "0.8 grams is a lethal dose. About one fifth of the barium meal was the poison barium. The barium chloride is a soluble salt and so is absorbed and kills rapidly."

"Who put it in the container?" Cornell asked.

"There you have it!" cried Edison, agitated. "I don't do many G.I. series and Miss Judson, my nurse, is in charge of that department. We have a one quart size container of the barium and that's all. It's kept in the dark room. Whoever put the poison in it knew where the dark room was, knew the arrangement of rooms in my office."

"What about Miss Judson?"

"Ridiculous. She didn't know Marion Hillman or Dudley Briggs from a hole in the wall, and cared less. The person who did it had a key to get in. He, or she, came when the office was closed, otherwise Miss Judson would have spotted him—or *her*."

"Pauline?"

"She was the only one with a key to the office besides Miss Judson and myself."

"The key," said Cornell, "could have been taken from her by Richard, by Serena Chalmers, or anybody else friendly with Pauline. Perhaps from Miss Judson, your nurse."

Edison slumped down in the chair, his long legs stretched out. For a second, Cornell thought the man might relax, but he didn't. The eyelids blinked rapidly, the fingers searched rapidly for details to touch, his toes moved constantly.

"Still," said Cornell, "you seem somewhat *relieved* that it is murder."

"I am. You can count on that. A doctor can't afford having his office make mistakes in medications. Now it's out in the open. The police will investigate and exonerate me of any connection with the crime."

"Why are you so sure?"

Edison looked surprised that it wasn't a foregone conclusion. "Because I had nothing to do with it. Nothing at all."

"You could have planted the poison there yourself."

"Oh, my God," Edison moaned. "And gain what? *What?*"

Cornell shrugged. "I believe you hated both Marion and Dudley."

"That's a hell of a case," Edison said and he got up. He retrieved his hat from the couch and repeated, "A hell of a case. Well, I guess this finishes my business with you, Cornell. I wish I could say it's been pleasant. Wish I could."

Cornell smiled, hoping he looked indifferent enough, wondering if Edison, who had not commented once about the adhesive tape across his forehead, had been the intruder who hit him.

CHAPTER X

WHEN Pauline arrived back home, Edna Anne Knight was just about to leave. She was alone in the foyer, and her bland face was dejected and her eyes were red.

"I'm . . . j-just g-going," she told Pauline weakly, stammering between sobs.

"What happened?" she knew. She knew that Richard must have told her.

"R-Richard sent me away . . ." She compressed her lips and ran out of the house. Pauline shook her head sadly, then went up the broad stairway to her room. She removed her make-up, put her hair back into braids, put on her glasses, dressed in her customary skirt and high-throated blouse, then came downstairs.

Rosamond was waiting in the huge foyer.

"Supper at six, Miss Pauline," the maid said.

"All right, Rosamond," she said. She went over to the library door, knocked, and walked in. It was an immense room, the walls lined with built-in mahogany bookcases, paneled walls, numerous stuffed leather chairs and reading tables, and a marble fire-place.

Richard sat in a chair, smoking a pipe, a magazine on his lap, which he wasn't reading. She sat down in a chair opposite him.

"Richard . . ." she began.

The tone of her voice seemed to catch his attention and his eyes looked up at her, expectantly. His drunk hadn't completely worn out of his eyes, al-

though his hands were steady enough.

"Richard, I've never asked advice from anybody."

"Don't I know it," said Richard.

"I've always had a. . . . Well, sort of a mania to do things for myself, to be independent of everybody. I've been obsessed with the idea that my aim in life was a career . . ."

"I know all that," he sighed.

Get it out, get it out, she told herself. You'll feel better. But don't slip about London. Not to Richard. You can't trust him. Not yet, anyway.

"I'm changing, Richard. I didn't realize it, but I've been changing for many months now. I have no family, except you . . ."

"Oh Christ," he said, exasperated. "What do you want me to say, Pauline?" He spoke with the pipe in his mouth and a puff came out with each breath.

"Be honest with me. Your opinion of me has been that . . . that I was . . . Well, queer."

"Oh, now . . ."

"It's true Not only you, but everybody has thought that. Once, Dr. Edison told me bluntly, to my face."

"Edison's a fool," said Richard.

"Anyway, there's been no romance in my life because I held no compassion for women who married and had babies and got fat and contented—having to hold out their hands to their husbands for every little item they needed."

"Shux, Pauline, get to the point."

"Now I'm in love with a man. Now my career means nothing to me. Indeed, when I think back to how desperately I wanted to be a doctor I'm amazed at myself." She watched his face but he showed no visible reaction at all.

"Who is he?" said Richard.

"Roff Inglewood, a corporation lawyer."

NOW there was a reaction, she noticed; a decided one. He stopped smoking and an excited look came into his eyes.

"The son of John Inglewood, New York's Senator to Congress?"

She nodded.

He was on his feet slapping his hands together. "Pauline, that's *won*-derful. Do you know what this means? I'll have an in. I'll have a starting point for my career."

"I was thinking of *myself,*" she said a little coldly.

"Oh, sure, sure," he added quickly.

"I don't want to hurt him. You know what a scandal would mean to him and his family. Suppose what they say about . . . about my father is true. It wouldn't be fair to Roff and to our children if the 'thing' is hereditary. Now these murders and investigations. I love him too much to get him involved."

And London, she added to herself. There it was, in headlines: Son Of Senator Marries Fake Doctor. Oh God!

"Grab him," Richard advised. "You'll never get another chance like this."

"I'll fight for him," she smiled. "I'll try and hold him as long as possible, providing it doesn't get him involved. When that happens, I'll give him up."

"He doesn't know *any*thing about you?"

"Not even my last name or that I'm a doctor."

The chimes to the front door sounded.

THE huge, colored maid let Cornell in and he found both Richard and Pauline in the library.

"Ah . . ." said Richard, "The Voice himself. What happened to your temple?"

"I'm glad to find you both together,"

said Cornell, smiling. "Oh, this. I cut it."

"Sit down," Pauline said, indicating a chair. Then she added, "Why? I mean, finding us together?"

"To extend my sympathies at your uncle's murder."

"Thank you," said Pauline.

But Richard had caught the last word. "What?" he said, frowning. "What did you say?"

"Murder," repeated Cornell. He watched the handsome face of Richard in front of him with awe. His type of good-looks was unusual in that Richard had a pretty face without losing any of his masculinity. He saw Pauline close her eyes, push her thumb and forefinger under her glasses and pinch the bridge of her nose to relieve the tension.

"Somebody," said Cornell, "who knew the arrangement of rooms in Edison's office, and who knew Dudley was going for x-rays today, deposited a palm full of barium chloride crystals, a soluble salt poison, in the container of harmless barium sulfate."

"Then . . .?" Pauline's face was white.

"Uh-huh," said Cornell. "The police have taken Dudley's body from the undertakers to the autopsy table."

"Oh, b'Jesus," Richard snapped, "is that going to hold up probation of the will?"

"I don't know why it should, unless . . ." Cornell broke off and shrugged.

"Unless," he finished, "you killed him. Him and Marion Hillman. I must admit, frankly, that a person of your type would murder for gain." There, that was blunt enough.

"A professional opinion?" There was no counter-attack, yet.

"Look at the facts. You are by nature opposed to hard work for a career. You are waiting for easy money. You hated Marion Hillman because she was going to upset your inheritance once she married Dudley. You hated Dudley for some reason I haven't fathomed, and you wanted his money badly. Now let me ask you a personal question."

"Go ahead." His dark eyes glinted.

"Were you in love with Marion Hillman?"

Richard pursed his lips, walked over to the table and picked up his pipe. He examined the bowl. "I was," he said. "I was but had no intentions of marrying her. She wouldn't have married me, anyway. She was after big stakes. Dudley."

"Then your emotions were in conflict. You loved her and hated her."

"Hell, no. I disliked her after she . . . Well, she made a proposition to me. She'd marry Dudley, divorce him, get her settlement and marry me. I turned it down. It was after that she went after Dudley with a great determination."

"That's true," said Pauline. "I always saw Marion chasing Richard around."

"She was a louse," said Richard.

"Anyway," said Pauline, "Richard's engaged to Edna Anne Knight."

"That's right," said Richard, tossing his cousin a grateful look. "I've been engaged for three years."

This was rather pat, Cornell thought, but he let it go.

"Thing is," said Cornell, to Pauline, "I've had a visit from a very interesting young man."

He watched her lips come together, and her chin shoot up in the air an inch.

"A young man who loves you very much," he added.

"Roff!" she almost screamed the name in a whisper.

"That's the chap. An intelligent, clear-minded young man, whose only

desire is to help you. Why don't you let him?"

"What did . . . he t-tell you?"

"A good deal. All about how you two happened to meet, three months ago, at the Central Park Zoo. How secretive you've been with him, not even telling him your name or occupation. He's not interested in that. Thing is, he simply wants to help you. By Jove, it's about time you grew up, Pauline."

"No . . . no . . . I'm never going to see him again." She sounded on the verge of panic. "He promised he wouldn't try to find out . . ." Tears came into her eyes, and she added softly, "How did he find out?"

"He was approached in the Park by a little fat cockney."

She turned her back to him, and stood staring out of the window.

" A who?" said Richard.

Cornell turned to him. "You wouldn't mind, would you, if I spoke to Pauline alone?"

Richard shrugged. "I mind, but I'll go anyway." His black eyes cast Cornell a glaring look.

WHEN they were alone, Cornell said, "It might help to tell me why the cockney was blackmailing you, Pauline."

"No!" she whirled around and screamed at him. Then she stopped and lowered her head. "I'm sorry."

"Roff bought no information, never fear. But he did learn your last name . . ."

She turned her back to him again.

". . . connected it with the murder of Marion Hillman in the newspapers, and came to see me through that. You needn't tell me why you were being blackmailed, but please answer this: Did your uncle, Dudley, know why you were being blackmailed?"

"Yes."

"Did Marion know?"

She nodded. "Dudley had told her. He confided everything in her. Marion then told me that she knew but that she wouldn't say anything as long as I didn't oppose her marriage to Dudley."

"So you see," Cornell said softly, "how much help you will need? Don't you see how perfect your motive to murder both of them is?"

He walked over to the door and called into the hallway, "Come in, Roff."

She whirled around, her body stiff, her eyes wide. "Oh, *no*. . . ." she moaned. "Please, no. . . ."

Roff came in and stood in the doorway. He looked at Pauline and she stared back at him. Roff said, "You dope. I'd become involved in anything for you."

Cornell saw her stiffened body relax. He saw a cold look come onto her face and she said in a clear, firm voice:

"You had no right to do this, Mr. Inglewood. I resent your interference in my life. If you . . . you chose to interpret a slight flirtation in a park as your right to enter my life—indeed, you are quite wrong." And, head up, she walked past the two men, out of the room, and ran up the stairs.

CHAPTER XI

CORNELL walked slowly back to his office and let himself in with his key. He turned on the foyer light and called:

"All right, it's I Serena," and he walked in.

Serena didn't come out, and he thought she is probably sleeping. He went to the bedroom door and knocked, then looked in. She wasn't there. A wave of panic began to sweep through his brain and he dashed into the kitchen, then the bathroom.

Serena was gone.

Frantic, he went back to the bedroom and searched for the remote possibility of her leaving a note. But there wasn't any. Her two dresses and the few underthings were gone, too. There was no indication at all that a woman had ever lived there.

He went back to his office and sank down into his swivel chair and held his head, trying to think. He decided that his goose was well cooked, now. They would pick her up. The police and the murderer. Both had an equal chance. Unless one or the other already had her. But would the murderer bother to take her clothes?

If the police picked her up, he knew, he was finished as a psychiatrist, as an officer of the D.A.'s office, in addition to which he faced charges of obstructing justice, aiding and abetting a possible murderess, and of malpractice of medicine.

He went into the kitchen and helped himself to a swig of the eleven year old Irish Whiskey. It helped him shake off the feeling of helplessness and he began to think in earnest.

He picked up the phone and dialed the D.A.'s number, asked for Ed Sands, the special investigator on the case, and in a few moments was talking to him.

"Ed, what's new on the missing girl?" he asked.

"Nothing, Doc. We've gotten reports from all over the country, from almost every state, saying they've spotted her there. It's a merry chase."

"Well, thanks. Do me a favor, Ed?"

"Sure."

"If Homicide, or the Bureau of Missing Persons spots her, let me know right away."

"I'll try, Doc," Sands said, sounding uncertain.

"I've got to ask her one question. Important to the Chief, I think."

Sands said he'd try and hung up, quickly.

That availed a neat nothing, Cornell thought. But where to start? Where?

Don't sit here, he chided himself. Start. Start *any*place. But *start!* Somebody's got her—her and your career and your freedom in the palm of his hand. And it could very well be the one who had hit you on the head.

And the only one who had not asked about the adhesive tape on your temple had been Dr. Burton Edison. Start *there!*

He got up, looked around the room in a sentimental gesture, as though looking at it for the last time, and went out. The hot, humid air sank onto his shoulders, smothered his face. It smelled dusty and damp and his shirt was wet with perspiration. Off into the distance came the rumble of thunder. Again, the promise of a storm to break the heat wave.

ON THE corner of The Avenue Of The Americas he stopped, reached into his pocket for a cigarette and lighted it. He had spotted a short, fat man standing near the newsstand. It was the same man who had followed him home yesterday; the man who fitted the description of Pauline's blackmailer, the cockney.

He walked on, formulating a plan of action. The devil with Edison. This was important. The little cockney wasn't waiting for him—just after the disappearance of Serena—for nothing.

It was supper hour and Manhattan was going home, tired, hot and bedraggled. Cornell walked along The Avenue Of The Americas, downtown. At Fifty-seventh Street, he paused, stopped to look into a show window of a jewelers. He could see the little cockney half a block away, also looking in a show window.

Cornell started walking again, and at

the corner of Fifty-third Street, he turned the corner, began to run, then ducked into the lobby of an office building. He flattened out against the wall, and saw, shortly, the fat man go by. He waited, and the cockney came back, searching up and down the street. Cornell saw him give a slight shrug and walk back to The Avenue Of The Americas.

He came out of the building and began following the cockney. Two, he said to himself, could play the same game. Once or twice, the cockney looked back but didn't spot him. Other than that, he kept on walking East, over to Ninth Avenue, then down to Forty-third. Cornell was exhausted. The sweat had seeped into his jacket and he felt like a wet herring. His head throbbed.

Finally the cockney climbed the brownstone steps of a dingy house that bore a sign saying "Rooms—Boarding."

Cornell waited till he had gone inside, then he followed. The narrow hallway smelled of cooking, bad cooking, and there were radios blaring in several of the rooms. He knocked on the door that said, "Mrs. Prince," and an elderly woman with straggling gray hair and a sharp nose, fanning herself with a newspaper, opened it.

"I'm looking for a man. I believe he boards here," said Cornell.

Mrs. Prince looked him up and down.

"Yeah?" she said.

"He's a short, fat man. An English cockney accent."

"Bunny Craig. Fourth floor. Room 42." And she slammed the door shut in Cornell's face.

He started up the stairs, watching the faded, soiled carpeting as he went up, listening to the boards squeak. At the second floor landing he paused for breath. Somebody was cooking coffee and the odor drifted out, mingled with humid, dusty air, and the mixture reached Cornell's nose and made his throat tighten. He went up to the fourth floor and found Room 42. He knocked on the door.

"Come," the cockney's voice called out.

CORNELL opened the door and went in. It was a tiny room, with an iron bed in the center, a chopped up walnut dresser against a wall, a wash basin near that, and a wooden chair. Bunny Craig was on the bed, leaning against two pillows, his jacket and shoes off.

Cornell stood there looking at him, noticing the heavy scar tissue over his face, the bent, flat nose, the dark, narrow eyes. And he noticed that Craig was scrutinizing him, and the fat man's hand had inched up slowly till the finger-tips were under the pillow.

" 'Ere, wot is it?" said Craig.

"You've been wanting to talk to me," said Cornell coming in, and sitting down on the rickety chair. He wiped his face with his handkerchief, and hoped his manner was one of indifference and confidence.

"Says you?"

"You have followed me twice." His eyes looked around the room. There was no place for Serena to hide even if she was here. Outside, through the window, he could see heavy black clouds over the Hudson River.

"Me, Guv'nor?"

"You've been asking blackmail of Pauline Setton and Roff Inglewood. I'm inclined to believe you know the whereabouts of an English girl named Serena Chalmers."

Craig was silent for a moment. His hand came away from the pillow, but not far. "I'm ready to talk business, Guv'nor," he said, a slight smile forming on his thick lips. He swung his

short legs off the bed and sat up, facing Cornell.

"Where's Serena? You've been watching my place and you must have been out there about the time she left."

"The police have been lookin' for the girl, Guv'nor," Craig said and winked at Cornell.

"I'm not worried about you knowing Serena was staying with me," said Cornell. "You have your own concern about the police, I'm sure." The look on Craig's face told him he was correct.

"What's it worth, Guv'nor?"

"Nothing. You'll have to tell me without compensation."

Craig shrugged. "See this face, Guv'nor?"

Cornell saw it quite clearly and not too happily.

"I been a fighter. Made a mark for myself in the light weight class. Before I put on this weight," he smiled, explaining. "I came 'ere to America for a bout or two and that was the end. I liked America, I did, and became a citizen. Then as a fighter I was through. I bummed around and then one fine morning, I'll 'ave you know, I discovered I had me a talent. I was a fine forger of anythin' written, thank you very much, and I promised meself I would find me golden opportunity. Now, don't get het up, Guv'nor. The police have nothin' definite on me, but one job got a mite warmish and I decided to visit me dear old mother in London. The war caught me there and I had to stay—but, Blimey, I found me golden opportunity in Pauline Setton and this whole rotten mess that's goin' on with the murders. Now, honestly, Doctor Cornell—am I to pass it all up and waste me life?"

"What was the blackmail of Pauline Setton?"

Craig laughed and his belly shook.

"Evidently," said Cornell, "you performed *some* forgery for her."

Craig shrugged. "Blast it, Guv'nor, you can guess all day and night if you want to. But, believe me, I'm gettin' me a bit of the golden opportunity if I . . . if I die tryin'. Eh?"

"Look here," said Cornell, "I want to know where Serena is."

"That would be tellin'."

"Then you know?" Hope heightened in Cornell's breast and a wave of anxiety surged through him.

"Blast it, yes. For a price."

"How do I know you're telling the truth?" said Cornell. "Thing is, you could take the money and tell me a lie. I would have no redress with the . . . ah . . . police."

"I seen her leave your place an' I tailed her to a boardin' house." Craig winked again. "Not far from 'ere, Guv'nor."

"Did she see you?"

He shook his head. "If I don't get paid from you, I'll see her meself. I don't believe the lass wants to be picked up by the police as yet."

"I'll give you a hundred dollars, Mr. Craig," Cornell said. It would be worth the hundred he figured, to get Serena back. He could deal with Craig later on, if there *was* anyway to deal with him.

"Good-day, Guv'nor," Craig said, sullenly. "There's a storm brewin' and you'd better get goin' 'ere it breaks."

"Confound you," said Cornell angrily. "What *do* you want?"

"A thousand."

"You're crazy, man." The sweat was pouring off Cornell's face and he was irritable to the point of explosion; irritable with the heat, with the blow on his head, with Serena's running off, with this fat cockney—all coming together at this moment to a head. There was a tightness running around his head like a heavy rubber band.

"I'll thank you to leave, Guv'nor," said Craig.

Cornell stood up and he looked down at the blackmailer. "Mr. Craig, I have never resorted to violence in my life . . ."

"You don't say," mocked Craig. But his hand began to inch along to the pillow.

". . . but I am forced now to warn you. Either inform me as to the whereabouts of Serena Chalmers, or I shall . . ."

CRAIG'S hand was near the pillow now, and Cornell knew he couldn't wait. He sprang at the fat man, and both fell over on the bed. Craig's arms went around him and they rolled off onto the floor. Both regained their feet at the same time, and Craig squared off, his right fist cocked near his chin, his left extended straight out.

Cornell stood there, both fists at the same level. For the briefest moment, he was amused. Amused that Alexander Cornell, eminent psychiatrist, product of the top social circles of Brahmin Boston, gentleman and scholar, had become embroiled in a case of murder to the extent that he was coming to physical blows with a scummy English blackmailer.

Craig's left jabbed out and landed on Cornell's mouth. He reeled back, and something warm and salty trickled into his mouth. He came at the cockney, swinging both fists up and down, hitting nothing but air as the ex-pugilist, despite his added weight, weaved and bobbed smoothly away from the ineffective blows. Craig landed a short right to Cornell's belly and the psychiatrist doubled up, and Craig crossed with a left that hit Cornell on his recently sutured temple. Blood began to ooze out of the adhesive tape.

"Come on," invited Craig, breathing heavily from the exertion, bouncing around on the balls of his feet.

Cornell came, more cautious this time, still flailing with his fists as though he were waving away mosquitoes, aware that he was bleeding from lips and temple, that he was exhausted from the heat and Craig's blows. His only consolation was the fact that Craig was filled with overconfidence, was enjoying the advantage he held as an experienced boxer.

Cornell charged, bending his head and pushing with his arms out. His two fists extended caught Craig in the chest and threw him against the wall. Then Cornell whirled, ran to the bed, shoved hand under the pillow and he had the gun.

Craig stopped his rebound from the wall as Cornell pointed the gun at him.

"Mr. C-Craig," Cornell gasped, winded, "unless you tell me where Serena is—Mr. Craig, the truth is, I am g-going to kill you." He believed it as he spoke. He believed, if actually necessary, he would pull the trigger of that gun.

Craig stood there staring at him, and evidently Craig believed him, too.

"She's at a boarding house on the corner of Tenth Avenue and Thirty-eighth Street," said Craig, his eyes fastened on the gun.

Cornell backed away from him, toward the door. He reached behind him and turned the knob, then threw the gun on the bed, whirled around, ran out into the hallway, slammed the door, and dashed down the stairs.

IT WAS black outside, and the wind was beginning to whip up. He walked over to Tenth Avenue, looked for a cab, couldn't find one, then decided to walk, patting away the blood with his handkerchief. He had a vicious headache now. At a corner, he stopped

in a drug store and went over to the prescription counter.

The pharmacist looked at him knowingly.

Cornell said, "I'm a doctor and I've been in an accident. Will you take a look at my temple? It was sutured this afternoon and I think it was opened again."

He followed the pharmacist, a short blond man with a heavy blond mustache, to the rear. There, the pharmacist provided a mirror for Cornell. "If you're a doctor, you can tell better than I," he said.

Cornell ripped off the adhesive tape and looked. The sutures still held, except for one at the end of the cut, from which the blood oozed. He swabbed it with iodine and taped it with a clean band-aid. His lip was cut on the inside where the teeth had dug into it, but the bleeding had stopped and the cut wasn't deep enough for a suture. He touched it up with iodine, thanked the druggist and left.

Despite the slight wind, the thunder and the lightning, it was hotter than before. He found the boarding house on Thirty-eighth Street and his heart pounded with anxiety. It had been a long, strenuous day, from the time he had purchased the steaks till now.

The boarding house was a decrepit affair, even worse than Bunny Craig's. The hallway had torn, faded linoleum on the floor. There was no door with any name on it. He knocked on the door nearest him and waited. No one answered. He knocked on the next door.

It was opened by the skinniest woman he'd ever seen. She wore a faded house-coat, something with red roses on it. Her face was greasy and her black hair hung down in strings. She glared at him with black, lackluster eyes.

"Pardon me," said Cornell. "I'm looking for a woman who took a room here today. A small, blonde. . . ."

"No one took no room today," she snapped. "We ain't had an empty since the war."

"Excuse me . . ." He was aware of the sinking feeling in his stomach. "I'm sure you must be mistaken. A small girl, blonde, pretty . . ."

"Mister, I own this . . .this . . ." her eyes shot around the hallway ". . . this place. Nobody took no room today."

Cornell stood there, waiting, hoping she'd reconsider, sure that she didn't realize what she was saying.

"Please be *sure,*" he said.

Wearily, "Nobody rented no room today, mister."

You're lying, Cornell's mind screamed at her. You're keeping something back. You're in cahoots with all of them. The pain in his head was worse.

"That all?" She moved her dry lips.

His arms fell weakly at his side. "Yes, that's all. Thank you." He turned around and went out into the darkness. The wind had died down and it had gotten a trifle lighter. Once again, the long sought storm had failed to materialize.

He walked slowly, thinking. Still no Serena, and Bunny Craig had lied to him. He'd wring the truth out of him yet. He quickened his steps and headed back for Craig's boarding house.

A year ago, he mused to himself, he was quietly going about his daily routine, seeing patients, working with the District Attorney on special cases, leading his usual, normal life. He was working then on his paper, Oedipus Complex in Relation To Eating Habits —a paper which brought down a storm of protest on his head.

He grinned to himself. He had thought *that* was exciting!

He was approaching Craig's board-

ing house now and he almost ran. He dashed into the hallway, up the squeaking steps to the fourth floor, and without knocking burst into the room.

It was empty. No Bunny Craig, no clothing, no gun. He sank down on the chair, looking around the empty room, and he began to laugh. He laughed softly at first, then as his pent-up emotions found an outlet for release, more loudly. The band around his head was like an iron vice with sharp prongs in it.

IN HIS office he turned on the lights, then walked up and down the floor of his consultation room—but his mind balked and refused to provide him with any suggestions for his future course of action.

He sat down at his desk, wanting badly a cold bath, a change of clothing, a good night's rest. He picked up the phone and dialed the number of the District Attorney and asked for Ed Sands. Sands was out and wasn't expected back till tomorrow.

He leaned back in his chair, and then he saw her. She was standing in the doorway that led to the small hallway to the back rooms. She was wearing the same white dress he had first seen her in, and her blonde hair was piled atop her head, and she was smiling at him, a sheepish smile, while the silver glints in her eyes were hard and beguiling.

"Alex . . ."

He sat there, looking at her, disbelievingly.

"Alex . . . I'm . . . s-sorry."

Anger wouldn't help, he warned himself. Slapping her wouldn't help. She could probably out-box him anyway. He would just sit there and take it easy. Keep calm. Let her do the talking.

"Please, Alex . . . please forgive me. I was s-such a burden to you. You were getting in deeper and deeper and I wasn't helping you very much. I ran away." The bubbles came back into her voice and she cleared her throat. "Then . . . then it dawned on me this would make it worse for you, especially if I were to be c-caught. I won't lie, Alex. I became scared, too. Panicky. My only safety was here . . . so I came back."

His emotions now under control, Cornell said, "Did anyone see you leave or come back here?"

"Oh no."

"Not even a little, fat man in a soiled white suit?"

"No . . . I made sure of that."

"Where did you go?"

"To a hotel on Forty-second street. No one knew me. It was a cheap, crowded hotel, with so many blonde show-girls. . . ."

Cornell was silent for a minute. Then he said:

"Don't, Serena. *Don't ever do it again!*"

"I won't . . . Oh, I won't. Please . . . do you forgive me, Alex?"

"Yes, yes. Of course." He sighed deeply. "There are two steaks in the icebox, Serena. If I got nothing else out of the day's endeavors, I'm going to have a steak."

She went into the kitchen. He filled the bath tub with cold water and sat in it for a half hour.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN Alexander Cornell awoke on Thursday morning he was feeling considerably better for his night's rest. His first call was from the District Attorney.

"Alex," the D.A. boomed into the phone. "I've received the autopsy report. Dudley Briggs died of barium chloride poisoning. I've been swamped

with newspaper reporters and the Homicide Squad has a man keeping tabs on Ed Sands, that much do they want to break the case first."

"Well, Dudley Briggs was a prominent man," said Cornell. His cut lip was tender and it bothered him as he spoke. His head still throbbed, as though he had a hangover.

"You're telling me. I've received hundreds of telegrams from various kinds of charity organizations, insisting I find the murderer of Dudley Briggs and prosecute him into the electric chair. Dudley Briggs gave a fortune in charities, to every sect and religion —and all these organizations control many, many votes. Do you hear me, my pet psychosis-dabbler?"

"They probably can hear you in China," said Cornell, holding the phone a half foot away from his ear. He was looking at Serena Chalmers, sitting in her favorite chair across the desk from him.

"You see why I'm concerned about your spare time activities?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure," the D.A. coaxed, "you don't want me to help you out?"

"Quite sure."

The D.A. sighed heavily into the phone. "I hope you know what you're doing. Just keep the department's nose clean. And, listen: none of those new tricks of yours, that hypnotism and narco-synthesis. The court won't accept that as evidence; won't even *admit* it in court."

"Yes," said Cornell.

"And, the D.A. said, his rich voice running over Cornell like syrup on pancakes, "Lieutenant Soose, of the Homicide Squad, has a peculiar report in his office. It's a statement from a dress shop, Audrey's, saying a man purchased some clothing for a small woman about the size of the missing Serena Chalmers. The description of the man might fit you, but I guess there's hundreds of men with curly tan hair gray at the temples, dark eyes, slender, neatly dressed, with a cowlick."

"Yes," said Cornell, weakly, feeling the sting of his Chief's sarcasm.

"Okay, then. I want you on Monday to go over evidence for a prosecution. Some nut shot his wife and mother-in-law." The D.A. hung up, leaving Cornell holding the phone and staring at Serena in solemn thought.

"He sounds ferocious," said Serena.

"He eats raw, human flesh," said Cornell. "And he's not particular as to the specie of psychiatrist."

"If only," she wrinkled her wide forehead, and her lids closed over her eyes, hiding the silver specks from Cornell's view, "if only I could know what the Black Key is. It would help you so much, Alex."

"Right in that pretty little head of yours is wrapped up the whole solution, complete and logical, ready to be plucked out. I can't box and I'm not the greatest detective in the world. But my advantage is having you and your dream. I am, frankly, not an amateur at psychoanalysis."

SHE leaned her head back against the chair and opened her eyes. Her face, Cornell saw, was beginning to show the strain of the ordeal; dark lines were forming under her eyes. She didn't laugh as much and she wasn't as calm. Her eyes were clouded and worried. This state made Cornell feel uneasy. What if she cracked, or ran away again, or became ill? That was the worst of it, *sickness!* He'd have to take her to a hospital, and, of course, the police would be near-by.

New determination surged through him.

"The next part of your dream, Se-

rena," he said to her, "relates that you are holding a bouquet of flowers. You blow on them and they wilt. You put them in a small coffin and a man wearing thick glasses comes and takes them out and it is now a small child. You remember that?"

"Yes, I do."

"The flowers are a symbol. Can you attempt an association for it?"

She was silent for a moment. "I can think of nothing."

"You killed the bouquet of flowers, or put them out of the way because they annoyed you. Remember, your mind wrote the script and whatever it says is your own wish or fear. It is not uncommon to have a death wish against a person for the most trivial annoyance caused by that person. The unconscious mind, being a childish mind fundamentally, knows death as a means to rid itself of an annoyance. So, then, why do you want the flowers out of the way?"

"My mind is a total blank, Alex."

"Don't force it. Relax. We can't stop now, we must drive at it."

Suddenly she turned her head to one side, and a shudder ran through her body. "I hate you!" she snapped. "I hate you terribly!"

Cornell ignored the outburst.

"You put the flowers in a small coffin and a man wearing thick glasses—that would be Dr. Edison—comes and takes them out and it is now a small child. Why does Dr. Edison take the flowers out of the coffin? What is the coffin? Why does the flowers turn into a small child?"

She shook her head. "Oh leave me alone, Alex. Can't you *please* leave me alone!"

"What is the coffin symbolic of? What is your first thought in connection with the vision of a small coffin?"

"No . . . *nothing.*"

"Why does Dr. Edison want to take the flowers out of the coffin?" Cornell kept after her.

She shook her head from side to side violently. Then she shot straight up in her seat, grabbed her throat with both hands, stared at him wild-eyed, and cried hoarsely, "Alex, help me. I'm . . . going . . . to . . . *scream!*"

Her mouth opened and the color drained f r o m her face. A scream started deep in her throat, never materialized, because she fainted.

CORNELL regarded her slumped figure in the chair, then took a bottle of smelling salts from the desk drawer, went over to her and held it under her nose. Many patients fainted in his office. A faint was a good way to escape reality, to remove one's self from a painful situation. Cornell accepted fainting with the same attitude he accepted tantrums in children.

She responded in a few seconds and her eyes opened.

"How do you feel?" Cornell said, and there was a peeved edge to his mild voice.

"I'll . . . I'll be all right," she said, her eyes not looking at him. She wriggled up in the chair.

"Can you manage breakfast?"

"Of course." She stood up without his help. She walked across the floor to the doorway, a little shaky, paused there, and without looking back said to him:

"I'm sorry. You must be terribly disappointed in me."

"Yes," said Cornell, with frankness.

She went on into the kitchen and Cornell sat down at his desk and pushed the cowlick off his forehead with the back of his hand. It was an impatient, determined gesture.

He picked up the phone and dialed a number.

Pauline Setton answered, after a few minutes, in a tired, weary voice: "Oh . . . Dr. Cornell."

"Everything all right between you and Roff," he asked glibly.

"No, it *isn't*. I never want to see him again."

"You're acting like a spoiled child, Pauline," Cornell told her.

"Please, Dr. Cornell. I've answered questions for Lieutenant Soose, for an investigator from the district attorney's office, for newspaper man, for everybody. I'm tired. I'm weary. The only thing I've got to fight for is to keep Roff out of it."

"Of course. But murder is a tough business, affecting the living more than the victim. You've got your hands full and you're in a pretty rough spot. It would help both you and me if I knew what manner of blackmail Craig was hooking you for? What piece of forgery did he do for you?"

"How did you know it was forgery?"

"A long story." He didn't feel like explaining his run in with Craig just now.

"I can't talk any more, Dr. Cornell," she said.

"Just one question. Suppose I say to you: bouquet of flowers. What person would you think of first?"

Pauline was silent for awhile. Then she answered, "Well, I guess Edna Anne Knight and her father. He owns a large chain of florist shops."

"Thank you very much," sighed Cornell, gratefully, and he hung up.

He went into the kitchen. Serena was setting plates on the table. On the stove, frying, were cut potatoes and sausages. Coffee was percolating. He sat down in his customary seat, facing the door.

"Mmmm. That smells good," he said.

She made no reply.

"Angry?" he said. He picked up the fork and toyed with it.

"Nn-nnn." But her face didn't smile or look at him.

"I guess you really *do* hate me."

"Oh . . ." She turned rapidly to look at him. "I could never hate you, Alex. You've been so kind to me. It's just . . . well, you expect me to provide answers to things I *don't know*. You become irritable when I can't. I'm trying, Alex . . . I'm trying so very desperately."

"Of course you are. And I'm trying to break down your conscious resistance. When I hammer at you, I'm attempting to brow-beat the conscious mind to one side so that the subconscious can come through. It's a healthy sign when the patient tosses the analyst a little hate. It means we're getting close because the unconscious mind resents outside attempts to lift its secrets."

SHE put the sausages on the table, then the potatoes and bread, then she poured the coffee. They began eating. In a moment Cornell said, "Does the name Edna Anne Knight mean anything to you?"

She stopped chewing and looked at him surprised.

"No. I've never heard the name before."

"She is Richard Briggs' fiancee and her father owns a chain of florist shops. She may be the symbol of the bouquet of flowers in your dream. I'll call on the Knights this evening and find out exactly."

"Yes," said Serena softly. "Just give them that smug look in your eyes. Talk to them in your low voice that will seep into every pore of their body. Look knowingly at them. Smile at them with your eyes. You'll irritate them to the point where they'll *burst* with informa-

tion or indignation."

"Do you know," he said, after a while, "that technically I'm also guilty of kidnapping."

"Oh, that's absurd. I'm here of my own free will."

"No, it's not absurd, little one. In a legal sense, I did kidnap you in hiding you from the public."

"How could they think that," she said softly, getting up, "when I act like . . . like *this*."

She flung her soft white arms around his neck and began kissing him passionately.

CHAPTER XIII

ALFRED KNIGHT, the tall, burly, hard-muscled man with the full head of sandy-colored hair, mustache to match, and unwavering blue eyes, who opened the door for Cornell, was the type of man American sentimentalists prototype as *The* American Man. Born of poor parents, in the slum section of New York City, Alfred Knight faced life's realities by being taken out of public school at the age of ten and set up on a street corner with a pile of newspapers under his frail arms.

Knight grew up in continual struggle with his environment and with other men conditioned by the same environment, setting up in him a firm and unshakable belief in the individualistic system of f r e e enterprise. As his struggle deepened, his muscles hardened, and the harder his muscles became the more antagonistic became his attitude toward his fellow man.

"Yes," said Knight, looking down at the shorter Cornell. His voice was gruff. He smoked a cigar furiously.

"I'm Alexander Cornell, from the district attorney's office." Knight was about fifty-three, Cornell judged, but remarkably agile and in good physical condition.

Cigar smoke wafted into Cornell's face as Knight clipped: "Credentials?"

Cornell waved away the smoke with his hand, and he felt the sides of his neck getting warm. Insufferable fellow, he thought. He produced his wallet. Knight didn't just glance at it. He took it in both hands and read it carefully.

Then he handed it back with a thrust. "This doesn't say much. It doesn't give you any authority," he growled.

Cornell shrugged and took back the wallet.

"Thanks for your courtesy. I'll have the district attorney issue a subpoena and you can talk to him downtown."

Knight showed he was a realist. "Come in," he said, without apology or without flinching.

In the living room, Cornell stood still, awed by the splendor and ultra-modern swank of the penthouse apartment. Extreme furniture, something Dali would dream up, glass a n d plastic and bleached woods. In two hundred years from now, it struck Cornell, these items would be the sought-after antiques representing an era.

Sitting at the huge, white-lacquered piano, was a plain-looking woman, about thirty-five, Cornell thought, who stood up when he entered.

"My daughter, Edna-Anne," Knight said and there was a rise in his voice and Cornell saw that his eyes and face softened when he looked at her.

Knight continued, "Let's go on the terrace, it's cooler." He led the way through the French windows, onto a wide terrace surrounded by a chest-high balustrade. The air was still and warm, t h a t Thursday evening, but thunder sounded far-off, becoming louder and steadier. Every so often the sky lit up a burning red as lightning

flashed. This was no false alarm storm, Cornell knew.

Knight sat down in a wicker chair and said, "Now, what is it, Cornell?"

Edna-Anne sat down on the swinging love-seat and Cornell leaned up against the balustrade.

"You must realize pretty well it's in reference to the murders of Marion Hillman and Dudley Briggs," said Cornell.

"We haven't a social interest in one another," Knight said.

CORNELL looked at Edna-Anne, noticing her blank face, the dull sandy hair, the nervous, wary blue eyes. He wondered how Richard Briggs had come to this plain girl, despite her money.

He said to her, "How long have you known Richard Briggs?"

"What's that got to do with Brooklyn Bridge?" Knight grunted, before his daughter could speak.

Cornell still spoke to Edna-Anne:

"It must be apparent to you, Miss Knight, that Richard is *not* in love with you."

The redness crept over her pale cheeks and she turned her head away.

"Oh, nuts," Knight scowled. "Pay no attention, Doll. That's pretty blunt, Cornell."

"Richard is not the type to delay marrying a girl he loved," said Cornell.

"The marriage was delayed because that old crank, Dudley, was against Richard marrying Doll—for some reason known only to his warped mind."

Cornell spoke again to Edna-Anne.

"You're a very sweet girl. Why was Dudley so antagonistic to you?"

"I'll say she's a sweet kid," Knight broke in again, puffing his cigar in an agitated manner. "A damn sight sweeter than those painted trollops you see walking around, who look like the Lost Weekend when they get up in the morning."

"I . . ." Edna-Anne finally ventured her own remark, "I hardly saw Richard's uncle. I've never insulted him, or spoke fresh to him, or did anything out of the way."

"He was an old fool!" snapped Knight. "The minute I heard the report on the radio that Dudley'd been murdered I said to myself: about time somebody had the guts to do away with a worthless old crank. Make what you want out of that, Cornell. I still say it."

"Daddy, *please* . . ." Edna-Anne pleaded.

"Sorry, Doll . . . I get so damn mad when the subject of Dudley's not wanting you comes up. Damn the whole thing. I'm sick of it. I wish you'd give up that good-for-nothing klutz, Richard."

"Oh, Daddy . . ." Her voice was breaking, ready to cry.

"All right, all right," Knight backed down.

Cornell observed that Knight was scrutinizing his daughter's face, as though trying to make out what was bothering her. Cornell observed, too, that Knight possessed a drive that would not stop at murder if it was necessary to achieve an aim. His love for his daughter was obviously a fixation and he would do anything to make her happy.

Cornell attacked Knight in his weak spot. "You know, I suppose, that Edna-Anne may be taken in for questioning at any time?"

THE cigar came out of Knight's mouth and he stood up to face his adversary. His face showed plainly both a desire to rip Cornell apart for daring the remark against his daughter, and an effort to control the feeling.

"Edna-Anne," Cornell went on, in his same mild voice, "is in love with Richard Briggs to the point where her feelings and pride are insensitive to the obvious truth that Richard wants to marry her only for her money and what she will inherit. That's a pretty strong love. Truth is, it's the kind of love that breeds murder. Dudley Briggs stood in the way, but not quite as much as did Marion Hillman."

"The nurse?" said Knight. "You're off the beam."

"Hardly," said Cornell. "Richard was in love with Marion Hillman. Edna-Anne knew it and saw herself losing Richard. She could have taken the envelope opener from Pauline's desk and killed Marion."

"Then why," said Knight, somewhat triumphantly, "would she kill Dudley and how did she get into Dr. Edison's office?"

"She's been at the Briggs home many times and could have taken the key from Pauline. She killed Dudley because she was growing weary—and scared—of waiting for Dudley to die so she could marry Richard."

Edna-Anne began to cry softly. A gust of wind swooped down over the terrace and mussed her hair. The lightning flashes now came with a sharp crack, followed by a closer time span of thunder.

"However," Cornell went on, "there is a way to knock the whole theory for a loop."

"What is it?" Knight said, anxiously.

"The murderer of Dudley Briggs had to be some one who was familiar with the office. If Edna-Anne could prove she's never been in the office, then . . . poof!"

Knight's face showed his disappointment. "We can't," he said. A piece of his belligerent manner had been chipped off, Cornell noticed. Face to face with the fact that his daughter's security and happiness were threatened, he had calmed down. "We have both been in Edison's office, not once but many times."

Then he turned his eyes to Cornell and said gruffly, "What's the real issue, Cornell. Without fancy words."

"Thing is," said Cornell, "that unless the murderer is caught—caught completely and proved beyond doubt the true culprit—a great many persons involved are not going to lead normal lives, myself included," he added hastily.

"I don't care about the others. Just me. And Edna-Anne."

"If the killer is never apprehended, your daughter's mind is never going to be quite certain that her father is not guilty. You, no matter how much you love and trust your daughter, will never be sure, *beyond doubt*, that she is not a murderess. These tiny suspicions will disrupt both your ways of life, possibly kindle into major conflicts."

"So?"

"So Edna-Anne is a reasonable suspect. So are you. I'm going to plug along those lines until I force one, or both, into the open and prove beyond doubt that you are innocent—or guilty."

Edna-Anne got up and said, "Good night, Dr. Cornell. I'd like to go for a walk." She started to walk across the terrace, then she stopped and turned to Cornell. "You see," she said, "Richard told me yesterday that he didn't want to marry me. It's all off between us, anyway."

"I'll walk down with you," said Cornell, moving over to her.

"Just a moment, Doll," Knight cut in. "Wait for the storm to pass over." He frowned at his daughter, but sympathetically. "Don't be sorry, Doll. Be glad you're rid of that klutz."

Cornell grinned broadly at this crude

attempt to keep Edna-Anne from talking to him alone, said, "Good night," and walked out of the apartment.

CHAPTER XIV

THE wind was beginning to move with a steady, firm sweep that whirled the bits of paper and dehydrated dust around and around in crazy circles. The night was almost pitch black and the lightning struck closer and closer to the city, the thunder boomed. No rain as yet, the storm still working up to a top fury.

Cornell stopped in a drug store and phoned the Briggs home. He spoke to Rosamond, asked for Richard, waited at least two minutes until Richard said into the phone: "Hi, Voice."

"I happen to be near Longchamps on Fifty-ninth Street," Cornell told him, "and I thought you might drop around and have a drink with me. From the sound of your voice, I imagine you're six up on me."

"Five. What'cha want me for?"

"It's about Edna-Anne. I'll wait for you," he said, and hung up.

Fifteen minutes later, Richard came in the door, and about the same time the storm unleashed its fury and it sounded like all hell had broken loose from its bonds and visited itself upon Manhattan. The building shook with the impact of the lightning cracks and claps of thunder.

Richard spotted Cornell at the bar and walked over, swaying slightly, a crooked, half-drunk smile on his face. "Let's get a table," he said to the psychiatrist. "Away from the rabble."

They found one in a corner and sat down. Both ordered straight Scotch, Haig & Haig pinch bottle, then Richard said, "The rabble. Something should be done about the rabble."

"What?"

"Subdue them. Eh?"

"Is that your aim in life?" said Cornell, mocking.

"My aim is politics. Oh, I'm too young yet, but I'm building up. And the way you build up for politics is to amass money. See?"

"There's nothing wrong with a political career," said Cornell.

"You're telling me. It's the only achievement. I mean, what's a scientist who discovers a miracle get out of it? Fame? So what does the cluck do with it? What do the movie stars do with their fame? But a man high in government office—he holds the whip. He has power. *That's* accomplishment."

Cornell scrutinized the handsome face and saw that Richard was in earnest. He changed the subject.

"I want to ask you about Edna-Anne."

"Oh . . . no!" Richard made a wry face. "You're spoiling my drinking session dragging me out in a storm for that."

"Are you in love with the wench?"

"Don't kid me, Voice. I gave her her walking papers yesterday, thank God."

The drinks came and Richard gulped his down before the waitress had taken up the tray, and he told her to bring him two more.

"Then why did you become engaged to her at all?"

"I'll tell you," said Richard, leering. "When a child, I loved to pull legs of flies and burn spiders. What you Freudians call a trauma."

"You're quite drunk," said Cornell, displeased at this common disparaging remark about psychoanalysis.

"But not enough to miss that damn superior look on your puss, Voice." Richard leaned over the table. "Who the *hell* do you think you are, Cornell? God?"

CORNELL smelled the odor of liquor on his breath and leaned away. "Do you know why Dudley was against your marriage to Edna-Anne?"

"She's seven years older than I am. Dudley, the old fool, wanted me to marry for love, not money."

"Thing is, it goes deeper than that."

"Oh, sure. It's God talking."

"Why did you hate your uncle so violently?"

"Violently?" Richard made a face of being touched to the quick. "Never violently, pal. Just a tiny, seething hate. Look, when I was four years old, Dudley comes to my parents and offers to take me off their hands. The old boy is lonesome and wants some one to dominate. So what? So my parents don't want me in the first place, and need the dough, my old man drinking the hell out of himself. So they give me to Uncle Dudley. So what? So nothing. Boot the little four year old kid around. Catch, you got him, pal?"

"You've never forgiven Dudley for that?"

"To hell with him."

"Are your parents alive?"

"In California, someplace. To hell with 'em, too."

"You've been carrying around quite a bitter load on your mental shoulders, and you've been reading larger importance into it than the circumstances warranted."

Richard waved his hand in Cornell's face. "Don't analyze me, Voice. I detest being analyzed."

The waitress came and set the drinks down in front of Richard and he again ordered a double. He drank the first quickly. He was rapidly taking on a load.

"But," said Cornell, "the delay in your marriage to Edna-Anne was caused because of Dudley's disapproval. You were then faced with the choice of waiting for Dudley's inheritance, or marrying Edna-Anne for her money and inheritance. You were weighing the advantages of both. Right?"

"Th'as it," Richard said, his speech becoming jumbled.

"But Marion Hillman stepped into the picture and if she married Dudley you couldn't hope for a sizable amount of your uncle's money. Then, with both Marion and Dudley out of the way, you give Edna-Anne the heave ho. You don't need her anymore."

Cornell surveyed the face of the man opposite him; the dark eyes and black wavy hair, the straight nose, the firm square jaw, the full, delicately-shaped lips, the dimples in his cheeks when he smiled.

"I suppose," Cornell added, "you've had more women at your beck and call than you could ever use, Richard."

Richard smiled at him drunkenly.

"I guess so," he said.

"But Edna-Anne was one woman you wanted far away."

"Th'as right."

"So if only Marion and Dudley would oblige and become non-existent, the whole problem could be solved, because money and an easy life means more to you than any person alive, except yourself."

"You're a dope, Voice," said Richard, becoming sullen.

"Fundamental character doesn't change because a man went into the Army, Richard," said Cornell. "Even before the war you were a parasite. Sure, you had a justified kick coming. Being tossed around at the age of four is not a pleasant remembrance. But you could have overcome that bitterness with intelligence."

"Oh, shut up," snapped Richard.

"You've had too much to drink."

"Shut up and go 'way. You bother

(Continued on page 116)

She went waltzing by us, every inch of her pouring out the old sex appeal

CREATURE OF HABIT

By WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

THE CALL came into the station about ten o'clock in the morning. It was one of those things. An old guy by the name of Prescott, who lived out on Wells street on the North side, had gotten a threatening letter. Naturally he was all upset.

Inspector Evans told me to go out there and look things over. He also told me to take Larson and Smith along.

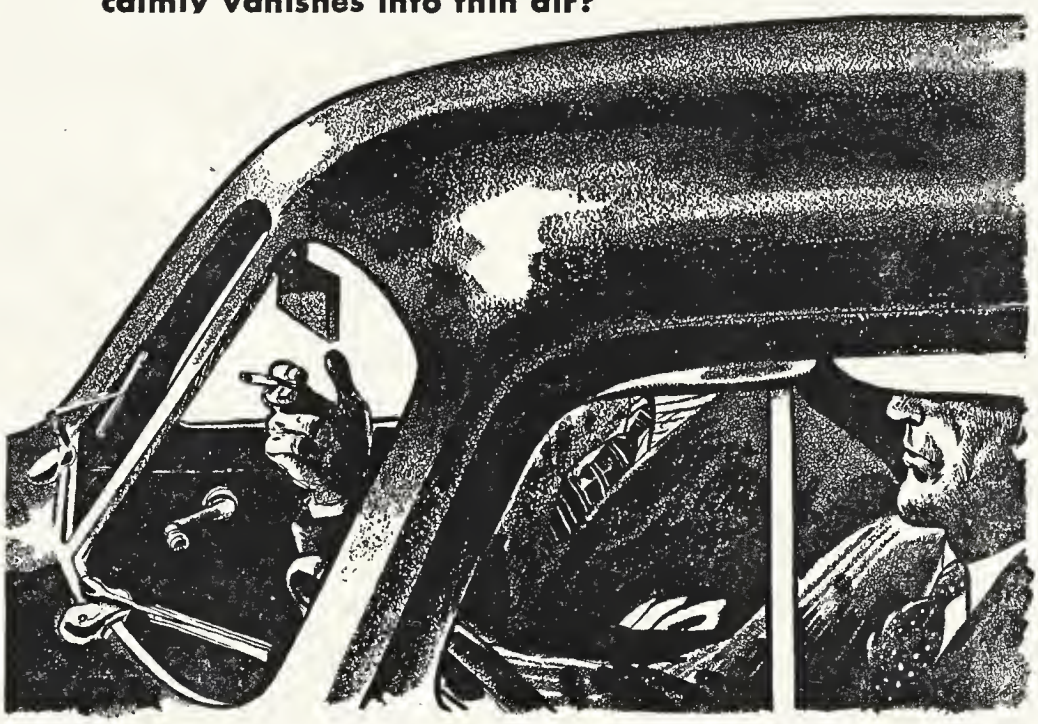
I stopped with my hand on the door of his office.

"Larson reads detective novels," I said. "He thinks he's Ellery Queen lately. Smith doesn't read anything, because he never learned how. What am I going to do with those two meatballs? Let me take McIntyre or——"

"That's enough, O'Neill," Inspector Evans said. He looked at me over his rimless spectacles and nodded at the door. "Better get going."

That ended the agrument. I went down to the locker room, looking for

How do you go about finding a girl who walks into a man's house, murders him, then calmly vanishes into thin air?



Larson and Smith. I found them sitting at one of the battered tables. Smith was playing solitaire and Larson was reading.

Smith was small, compactly built, and almost completely without brains. He had a certain snoopy, tenacious streak in him that made him valuable on jobs like checking names in the telephone book, or punching every doorbell in a square mile of apartment buildings and asking the same question of everybody who answered. He never got tired on jobs like that.

I looked down at the game of solitaire he was scowling at so intently, and I noticed he was cheating. He always did.

Larson nodded at me and smiled.

"What do you want, flatfoot?" he asked, with a display of the type of humor he'd been getting out of detective novels.

"You and Smith are coming with me," I said. "We got to make a trip out North."

Larson put down his book regretfully. He is big, strong, Swedish, and fairly intelligent, in spite of his peculiar theories about crime. He thinks every case has Fu Manchu lurking in the background, and he's always on the lookout for weird South African poisons, or Javanese blow-guns.

"I was just finishing an interesting chapter," he said. "This guy gets killed in a locked room. The door is locked, the windows are locked. From the inside," he added impressively. "Now the problem is how the murderer got into the room, killed the guy and got out, and still left the windows and doors locked on the niside."

"That's quite a problem," I said dryly. "Now let's get going."

THIS guy Prescott lived in a fancy neighborhood, in a two-storied house that looked like ready money. It was set back about fifty yards from the street, and the lawn looked like a putting green. The house was white stucco and there wasn't any porch, just a sort of arched vestibule leading to the wide door.

Smith said slowly, "This place looks like dough to me." He always comes up with the everyone else is thinking, because he has a nice simple head.

Larson said, "These neighborhoods are deceptive. They look peaceful and serene but who knows what's goin' on underneath."

"Yeah, who knows," I muttered.

I wondered what Evans had against me, to dump both of these potatoes in my lap.

I punched the doorbell and a few seconds later a maid opened the door.

Larson flashed his shield, which is something else he picked up from books. I think he flashes it at his wife when he goes home.

"Is Mr. Prescott home?" I said.

"Yes," she said, opening the door wider. "Won't you come in?"

She was a woman of about forty, with graying hair and a sallow complexion. She was wearing a blue uniform, gray cotton stockings and flat-heeled black shoes. I thought her eyes looked frightened.

She closed the door behind us, then hurried down a wide impressive hallway to a pair of closed mahogany doors. She opened them and said, "Mr. Prescott, the gentlemen from the police are here."

The tired voice of an old man answered. "Ask them to come in, please."

She nodded to us and we walked through the double doors into a large room, with book-lined walls, comfortable dark furniture and a wide fireplace.

Seated before the fireplace with a

blanket over his knees was a white-haired old man, with a high forehead and lean features. The skin at his neck hung loosely over a stiff collar and his hair was like a fuzzy halo. He looked like a retired judge.

He nodded at us and stretched his lips in what might have been a smile. With old people it's hard to tell.

"Sit down, please," he said. "It was good of you to come right out. This thing has worried me considerably."

"Tell us about it," I said. "When did you get the letter?"

"Last night," he said. "It came special delivery, at about eight o'clock."

"Why did you wait until this morning to call us?" I asked.

Mr. Prescott shrugged thin shoulders. "I didn't think it was serious at first. Then the more I thought about it, the more concerned I became."

"Let's see the letter," I said.

He picked up a slim envelope from the table beside him and handed it to me. The envelope had thirteen cents worth of cancelled stamps and it had been mailed from the downtown section of the city.

I took out the letter, spread it open, and read:

"You are an unnatural old man. Your crimes are heavy and black. You will receive your punishment before long."

THERE was no signature, no salutation and no date. Just those two lines in pica type. Larson was trying to read it over my shoulder, so I handed it to him and look up at Mr. Prescott.

"Do you have any idea of who wrote that?" I asked.

"None at all," he said.

"Do you have any enemies?" I said.

"None that I know of," he answered.

"What about that crack about black and heavy crimes? Any idea what that might mean?"

"No, I haven't," he said. "I have been retired from business for over fifteen years. I have no friends, and I very seldom leave this house."

Larson was tapping the letter impatiently against his knee and looking very shrewd and knowing.

"How about a cult angle?" he asked. "You know there are things like that going on. Maybe some weird society has got it in for Prescott. Remember the Black Hand murders?"

"That was in Japan," I said.

"Sure, but it might be something along the same line."

"Sure," I said. I turned to Prescott. "Do you have any family?"

"My wife died years ago," he answered. "I have one daughter, Laura, who married last year."

"Where is she now?"

The old man looked down at his thickly veined hands and took a little time before answering.

"She lives in California. I have not seen her since she was married."

"How come?"

"I was opposed to her marrying. In my opinion the man she married was completely irresponsible and worthless. I refused to give my consent to the wedding and they aloped. I have heard from private sources that they have been living a financially precarious existence. I was not surprised."

He was rather pleased too, I decided.

"Are they still in California?" I asked.

"I received a letter from Laura about a month ago asking me for money," he said. "She also indicated that they were planning to return to Chicago. She may be here, but she hasn't gotten in touch with me."

"Did you send them the money?"

"Certainly not," he snapped.

"Do you have any provision in your will for Laura?" I asked.

"No," he said. "I changed my will, which had been made in her favor, when she married."

"Do you think she might have written this letter?" I asked. "She's probably pretty mad, and maybe she thought she might scare you into helping her out."

He smiled grimly. "I think my daughter knows me better than that."

"What was the name of the guy she married?"

"She married a man named Walsh—Henry Walsh. I believe he is in insurance business."

"Was he a native Chicagoan?" I asked.

"No. But he had been working here for several years before he met Laura."

I wrote down that name in my notebook and then I got up.

"Do you want a guard put on the house, Mr. Prescott?" I asked.

"Do you think it's necessary?"

I shrugged. "Might be. But I don't think so. We'll look around a little bit, and if you get any more letters get in touch with us. And we'll take this letter along. I don't think there's anything to worry about."

"Thank you," he said. "Would you care for some tea before you leave?"

I was hoping he'd suggest a drink, but tea didn't sound so good.

"No, thanks," I said. "We'll run along. And by the way, how many servants do you have here?"

"Just Agnes," he answered. "She's been with me ten years."

"Do you have a chauffeur or gardener?"

"I have a man who takes care of the lawn in the summer, but in the winter he goes to Wisconsin."

I got his name and then we left. Agnes let us out the front door. She still looked frightened and anxious.

WE GOT in the car and started back to the station.

Larson was riding in front with me and Smith was sitting in the back.

"Smith," I said, "I want you to check this guy Walsh. Make all the insurance companies, find out who he worked for, how much he made and what kind of a guy he was. Find out where he came from and why he left."

"Okay," he said.

Larson was nodding wisely.

"You got the same idea I have," he said.

"Maybe," I said.

"It's sure-fire," he went on enthusiastically. "The daughter and this guy she married need dough. So they come back here and try and scare the old man into repenting."

"He doesn't look like the kind that would repent very easily," I said.

"That could be bluff," Larson said. "He might be scared silly. After all he called us in, didn't he? That means he's worried."

"It doesn't necessarily mean anything," I said. But I was thinking the same way. "You, Larson, check on this guy who cuts the lawn and spends his winters in Wisconsin. And find out who the maid was before she came to work for Prescott."

"I'd rather push this other angle," he said. "I got an idea that——"

"The maid and the part-time gardener," I said gently. I looked sideways at him, over my glasses, the way Evans always looks at me when I argue.

He said, "Okay," and sighed. Just the way I do when I'm agreeing with Evans against my better judgement and want to let him know it.

I dropped Larson and Smith, then went back to the station and told Evans what had developed. The rest of the

afternoon I loafed around the station, kibitzing the gin rummy games, and trying to look like I was thinking. I wasn't, of course. I didn't have a thought in my head.

About four o'clock Larson checked in, and a few minutes later Smith showed up. But before I could talk to them the desk sergeant called me to the phone.

I picked up the receiver, said, "O'Malley talking."

"This is Mr. Prescott's maid. He asked me to call you. He wanted me to ask if you'd put a guard at the house tonight."

Her voice was husky and frightened. I remembered that her name was Agnes.

"Agnes," I said, "has anything else come up? Any more letters?"

"I don't think so," she said. "I don't know. But Mr. Prescott seems worried."

"All right, we'll be right out. Tell Mr. Prescott there'll be somebody watching the place all night."

"Thank you."

I hung up and went to find Larson and Smith. I told them to get in the car and a few minutes later we were bowling out toward the Prescott home.

On the way they told me what they'd learned. Larson had checked on the gardener and the maid. Agnes was just a maid, and the gardener was in Wisconsin and had been there for the past four months. He was sixty-nine years old, and he seemed to be all right.

SMITH had done better. He'd gotten a line on this Henry Walsh that Prescott's daughter had married. He had worked for the Acme Insurance company and his record was pretty good. He'd been with them four years and was earning about fifty dollars a week. Not a Rockefeller, but not a pauper either. He had come to Chicago from downstate Illinois, had gone to State University for three years and his record was good.

"I got all this," Smith said, "from the application he made to the Acme outfit when he went to work there. It told all about his school, how he majored in English, and had the lead in the sophomore play and was a whizz at tennis. He seems to be all right."

Larson looked wise and nodded impressively at me. I didn't know what that was supposed to mean. But I gathered he was developing a case of Sherlock-itis.

We pulled up on the opposite side of the street, directly across from Prescott's house, and I told Smith to go around the back, see that everything was quiet and then stay there and keep an eye on things.

Larson and I lit cigarettes and prepared to wait. The lights were showing on the first floor of Prescott's house, and everything looked quiet.

I didn't intend to stay long. I figured I'd leave Larson in front and go home for dinner. The days when I enjoyed working all night were a long time ago.

The street was quiet and it was just that hour when shadows of the trees and the dusk start to blend together. Plenty of light, but it was that smoky, cathedral kind.

About ten minutes after we'd gotten there I saw a girl walking down the street. I couldn't see her too clearly, but I saw enough to make me realize that she was the type you'd expect to find walking the streets. Although not a street like this one Prescott lived on.

Larson saw her too, and he whistled. He's like that.

She was wearing a thin satin dress, a cheap brown fur scarf and high-heeled, ankle-strap sandals. She gave

each hip a work-out every time she put her foot down. Her hair was blonde and phony-looking under one of those hats they make out of a strap of velvet and three sick-looking roses. She was chewing gum.

I watched her coming down the street and wondered a little where she was going. She was on Prescott's side of the street, and she was walking purposefully, as if she had a definite destination in mind.

And she had. When she reached the entrance to Prescott's house she turned in and walked to the doorway. I scratched my head and glanced at Larson.

"Maybe the old boy isn't too old at that," he grinned.

She rang the bell and waited, tapping one foot in time, as if she might be humming to herself. A little while later the door opened and after a little talk with whoever opened the door she went inside.

The door closed behind her. I glanced at my watch. It was about five-thirty.

Larson and I talked it over. We wondered who she was, what she might be doing in there, but we continued to sit on our big fat personalities and smoke cigarettes. I sometimes wonder where coppers get their reputation for being smart.

TIME went by and when it got to be six o'clock the street was dark. The lights were still on in the Prescott house and they threw a slanting wedge of light across the shadows of the lawn.

I was beginning to get restless. I was late for dinner but that didn't seem important. I was about to suggest we take a look when the shot sounded.

One shot, sharp and clear!

It came from the Prescott house. I got out of the car fast and went across the street on the run. I dug my gun from my pocket and had it in my right hand when I reached the door. Larson's pounding footsteps were right behind me.

The doorknob turned in my hand and I went into the hall fast. The hall was dark but the double doors leading to the library were open and light was showing.

I got to those doors in three quick strides and went into the library, crouched low, gun ready.

There was no need for caution.

Old man Prescott was sitting in his chair. There was a white gag through his lips and there was a blue hole in his forehead from which blood was welling.

The place was kind of messed up. About a dozen books had been pulled off the shelf just behind Prescott's chair, and I could see a small wall safe that had been built in behind the books. Its door was open; the interior was empty.

I stepped around the sofa and started toward him and almost tripped over the maid.

She was lying on the floor, looking like a tired sack of meal. There was a wicked-looking welt on her forehead, but she was breathing.

Larson was panting heavily in my ear; and while we were staring stupidly at the scene, Smith charged into the library from the rear entrance. His gun was out and he was in a low, business-like crouch.

"Anybody go out the back way?" I said.

He shook his head. "Not a soul."

"You and Larson go through the house," I snapped. "And make it fast."

They started off and I did what I could for the maid. I put her on the couch, wiped the blood from her forehead and tried to get her to drink a little brandy. She couldn't, so I did.

But she came around all right. When

she saw Prescott she started screaming and it took me a little while to quiet her down. She shut up finally, but kept sobbing and moaning.

I called headquarters and told them to send out what we needed and then I went back to the maid. She was quiet by that time, like a cow is quiet when you bat it over the head with a maul.

I shook her until her eyes flicked open.

"Who was that girl that came in here?" I demanded.

She shook her head and started to cry.

"You've got to shape up," I told her. "Crying won't help him now. Who was she?"

"I don't know," she wailed. "I never saw her before."

"Was Prescott expecting her?"

"He must have been. He told me to let her come in. I didn't like it. She didn't look right."

"Okay, what happened?"

"I let her in, and she went into the library. Mr. Prescott told me everything was all right, then he closed the door. That's all I know until I heard the shot. I ran in here and she hit me over the head."

I couldn't get any more out of her. She turned her head into the pillow and started moaning.

LARSON and Smith came back into the room, guns out, puzzled expressions on their faces.

"We didn't find anything," Larson said.

I swore. "Smith are you sure nobody left the house by the back door?"

"Positive," he said.

"Was the back door open when you came in?"

"Yes."

I swore again. "People don't evaporate. A girl came in here and she didn't leave. Now where is she?"

"She ain't in the house," Larson said. "Unless she's the Invisible Woman."

I went back to the maid. She seemed afraid of me. Maybe she should have been. I wasn't feeling friendly.

"What did that girl look like?" I yelled.

She said through her sobs, "I don't know. I didn't get a good look at her. But she had blonde hair and it didn't look right. She looked funny. And she kept her face from me."

"That's a lot to go on," I muttered. "A blonde who doesn't look right. None of them do."

I was feeling like a complete dunce. I'd been warned that something was going to happen. And I'd sat like a fool and watched it happen.

I looked at the empty wall safe and then back at the maid.

"What did he keep in there?" I asked.

"Money," she said, between sobs.

"How much?" I asked.

"I don't know. He never told me. But it was a lot, I think." She started to wail again.

I ran a hand irritably through my hair.

"I'm going through this house," I said.

I did. I went through the basement. Through the first floor, through the second floor, and through the attic. I found dust in the basement, rooms on the first and second floor, and more dust in the attic. Excellent results.

I got back to the library just as the front doorbell rang. Larson and Smith looked at me in silence. The maid was still sobbing. The doorbell rang.

I WENT out into the hall and opened the door. A girl and a young man stood there. She was small, dark and pretty in a nice-looking way. He was

of medium height, slim, with blonde hair and lean features.

They both looked at me uncertainly.

"I'm Mr. Prescott's daughter," the girl said. "This is my husband, Ralph Walsh. Is anything wrong?"

Maybe she saw it in my face, I don't know.

"Why should there be anything wrong?" I asked.

Her husband said, "Who are you? What kind of a game is going on here?"

"I'm the police," I said. "Maybe you've heard of them. They show up when people get themselves murdered."

They looked blank and scared, then the girl started to cry. The young man put his hand against my chest and shoved. I stood there and watched him. He didn't shove very hard.

He dropped his hand and said furiously, "You can't get away with this."

"Come in," I said. "You've saved us a trip. I was going to start looking for you."

They followed me into the library. I watched the girl closely. She looked at the ugly picture her father made for almost a minute, then she put her hands over her face and began to sob. Her husband put an arm around her shoulder and glared at me. He didn't like me.

"You're a fine sort of a man," he said tensely.

"That won't get us nowhere," I said. "This is murder. And the age of chivalry is dead and gone. How come you people barged in here at this particular time?"

"Her father phoned us and asked us to come out here," he said.

"When was that?"

"I don't know exactly. About four or five o'clock."

"Where have you been since then?"

"We came as quickly as we could. I had a few things to do first, then we drove out."

"You drove out? How?"

"In my car."

I nodded. "All by yourself for the last hour or so. That makes a good alibi."

He didn't understand. Or he didn't seem to. "What do we need an alibi for? If you think we killed him, you're crazy."

"Nobody said you killed him," I said. I turned to the maid, who was sitting up now, and sniffling. "Is that right? Did the old man call this pair and ask them to come out here?"

She turned her red eyes to me and nodded. "Yes," she whispered. "He wanted to see them."

"Do you know what for?"

She shook her head and started crying again.

That was as far as I got. The coroner arrived about that time, and with him came the photographers and lab men. While they were working Larson came over and tapped my arm. "I got an idea," he said. "I think I got the whole thing figured out."

"Good," I said gloomily.

He left me and walked over to Ralph Walsh. He started talking to him but I didn't bother to listen. I went over to Prescott's body and looked around. I called the maid over and pointed to the wadded gag that had been used in his mouth.

"Where did that come from?" I asked.

She kept sniffing and I worked hard to control my irritation.

"Just take it easy," I said patiently. "I need your help. I'm no mind reader."

"It's a napkin from the linen closet," she said.

"Where's that?"

She pointed to the back entrance of the library, where a short hall led to a butler's pantry. "Mr. Prescott had that put in so he could serve himself in here

without disturbing me. He kept tea and things like that in there."

I TOLD her to come along and I walked back there. The hallway that led from the library to the small pantry was about six feet long. On one side was an English racing print. On the other was a panelled oak door.

"This the linen closet?" I asked.

She sniffed something that might have been "yes" and fished a ring of keys from her pocket and opened the door. I went in and snapped the light on. The closet was about six feet square and immaculate. There were shelves of tablecloths, starched and neatly stacked, piles of napkins, and the top shelves were covered with cases of canned goods. Enough to feed a regiment.

"Hoarder?" I asked the maid.

She sniffed again. "He just liked to have plenty on hand," she said.

I went back to the library. The lab men were looking for fingerprints and a ballistics man was inspecting the hole in Prescott's forehead.

Larson was standing in the center of the room and when he saw me he waved me over.

"I got it," he said.

"You sure?"

"Sure," he said.

"Fire away," I said.

He had a hunter's look in his eye as he turned to the Prescott's daughter and her husband. They were standing together, arm-in-arm, and they were whispering together.

"Walsh," Larson said, "I want you to listen to a little story I'm going to tell. Maybe you can help me out on some of the points I'm not sure of."

"Go to hell," Walsh said flatly. "You're trying to pin something on me and I'm not talking."

"I don't want you talk," Larson said. "I want you to listen. First, we got a funny case here. A girl comes in here about an hour ago, robs the safe, and kills old man Prescott. At least we think she did. The funny thing is the girl disappears into smoke. We come right in here after the shot and she's gone. No trace at all. Now we don't even know what she looks like. But we do know one thing. She didn't look right. That's the word the maid used in describing her. Now do you have any idea why this girl didn't look right?"

Walsh wet his lips and looked down at his wife. He didn't answer.

"No idea, eh?" Larson went on. "Then I'll tell you. Because she wasn't a girl at all."

I looked at him sharply. But he seemed sure of himself.

"No," he said. "She wasn't a girl. She was a man disguised as a girl. And if I was looking for a guy who could handle an impersonation like that, I'd start looking for an actor. I'd look for some guy who'd been on the stage, or who had some experience in college theatricals."

WALSH was paler now. "You're absolutely crazy," he said. "I see what you're driving at. Sure, I fooled around with the dramatic society in school. You evidently know that. But I didn't do this thing." He stepped closer to Larson and stuck out his chin. "You're just dreaming. You haven't a shred of honest proof. If you did, you wouldn't be talking; you'd arrest me."

"I'm going nice and slow," Larson grinned. "Now let me tell you the rest of my little story. You come down the street dressed as a woman. You come in here. The maid is out of the way. You get the currency from the safe, probably scare the old man into giving you the combination, then you let him have it. Now you know somebody's going to be busting in here right after the shot.

First of all in comes the maid. You bust her over the head, then you go out in the hallway and hide there. We come barging in the front door and go right into the library. You slip out and presto! The lady has vanished."

"I'm not saying anything," Walsh said.

"You don't have to," Larson said. "You had every reason to kill the old man. You hated him, he cut you out of his will, so you figured this was your best chance. You had the motive, you had the opportunity, and you had a perfect way of doing it. Only it wasn't perfect enough."

"You can't prove anything," Walsh said. "You're just running a bluff. I was with my wife every minute of the time you claim I was here killing her father."

"Don't worry about me proving it," Larson said. "You can't have hid that girl's costume very far from here and we'll find that. And we'll find the money. We'll prove it, all right."

"No you won't," I said.

Larson jumped like he'd been kicked. "What do you mean?" he yelled.

"Just what I said," I told him. "You'll never prove Walsh killed Prescott."

"Why not?"

"For the simple reason that he didn't," I said. "You got a good case built up. It sounds pretty. And some of it is awfully close to what happened. But you just got the wrong party, that's all."

"Then who did it?"

I had an audience now. The photographers and the ballistics men were watching. Even the coroner had looked up and listened. The room was nice and quiet.

"This is what happened," I said. "The blonde girl who came to the door was phony all right. The blonde hair was a wig, and the clothes were part of the disguise. She came in here just like you said. She took the money and she killed the old man. But now the story gets a little different. Because after she killed the old man she didn't leave. She stayed right here."

Larson looked at me for a second, then he broke the tense silence with a laugh. "The Invisible Woman," he said.

"Yes, she was invisible," I said. "Because we weren't looking for her. We were looking for a snaky blonde, with a satin dress and high heels."

I TURNED and faced the maid. "But we weren't looking for a dowdy little woman who was lying on the floor with a cut on her forehead."

The maid stopped sniffling. Her eyes were snapping angrily.

"You can't talk to me that way," she said shrilly.

"Sure I can," I said. "I know you killed the old man. You dressed up like a slinky siren, after phoning me to come down here and put a guard on the place. You did that because you needed a witness. Then you walked down the street, pretended to ring the bell, walked in. You probably changed your clothes first, then gagged the old man while you went through the safe. When you got the money you hid it, then came back here, shot him and whacked yourself over the head. And don't tell me I'm wrong because I can prove it."

She whispered, "proof," like it didn't taste very good.

"That's what I said. You gagged him with a napkin from the linen closet, but you're such a careful maid that you automatically locked the door after you got the napkin. And you had to unlock it a minute ago when you took me back there. You had the keys and you're the only one who could have gotten in there. A stranger couldn't have gotten in there.

If you hadn't forgotten and locked that door you might have gotten away with it.'

She didn't say anything for a minute, and the silence in the room built up until it was something you could actually hear. Then she sat down slowly and her lips started moving. No sound came out at first, but in a minute she was talking, staring dead-pan at the floor, and the whole story came out, quietly, without any emotion at all.

She had stolen the money a month before and she knew she'd be caught when it was discovered missing. There wasn't anyone else who had a chance to take it. So she decided to get rid of the old man and make it look like a burglary killing. When his daughter and son-in-law returned from California she made her move. She wrote the threatening letter, talked Prescott into calling the police. Then that afternoon when she heard Prescott calling his daughter and asking her to come out to the house that night, she called me with a phony story about Prescott being nervous, and got into her disguise.

When she saw our car pull up she started down the street. When she went inside she changed clothes in a hurry, threw the fake outfit into the furnace and went in and finished the job.

But she forgot and locked the door of the linen closet after she'd gotten that napkin.

And that hung her.

It would be a nice ending if it turned out that Prescott had asked his daughter to come out to tell her that he had changed his will back in her favor.

But that wasn't what he wanted to see her about.

Because his final will was still in effect it left everything to Agnes, his faithful maid.

No one will ever know, I guess, what he wanted to see his daughter for.

Larson has some weird ideas about it, which he keeps muttering to himself, but I don't listen. I believe he thinks old man Prescott was really Fu Manchu.

THE END

THE BLOODHOUND COMES HOME

THE case of the state of Tennessee against Uncle Joe seemed fairly strong. The evidence, though not direct, was enough to bring conviction against the elderly Negro, for bloodhounds had tracked to the old man's house. Uncle Joe had no money to pay an attorney, but his defense was undertaken by a young man who had but recently passed the bar and was eager to try his hand at a case. Here are excerpts of the amazing defense, as uncovered in the files of a Tennessee county of the past century:

"Your Honor and gentlemen of the jury: When it becomes necessary to hale an upright, respectable citizen into court to answer to a charge of purloining the fowls of a neighbor, then things have come to a high pass in the noble county of Williamson.

"The sole evidence upon which the prosecution hopes to convict this old body servant of a major in General Robert E. Lee's army is not evidence at all. It is not proof that any jury should accept. It is the testimony of a bloodhound which, when it reached the end of the trail it was following, jumped up into the lap of the defendant and tried to lick his face, and gave other evidence of affection.

"Now Major McEven, whom this defendant used to serve, was a fancier of bloodhounds; when he died from the effects of a wound received at Drewry's Bluff, his bloodhounds were parceled out among the Negroes on the place and a pair were given to this defendant. Whatever puppies he raised, he sold or gave to his friends, last year giving a pair of three-month-old puppies to the sheriff of this county. One of these puppies, gentlemen, is the bloodhound that trailed the defendant to his cabin door."

At this point, the prosecutor protested loudly, saying that Uncle Joe had been seen near the premises on the night of the theft. Much mollified, he heard from the defense attorney that, indeed, the old Negro had passed that way, but he was only in search of a Christmas tree for the church. There was no doubt of it; the bloodhound had not stalked a criminal, but had smelled his way to his old master's house where he knew he would be well cared for.

The case against Uncle Joe was dropped, and the old man went his way, chuckling at the law.

—*Sandy Miller*

WELCOME HOME, KILLER

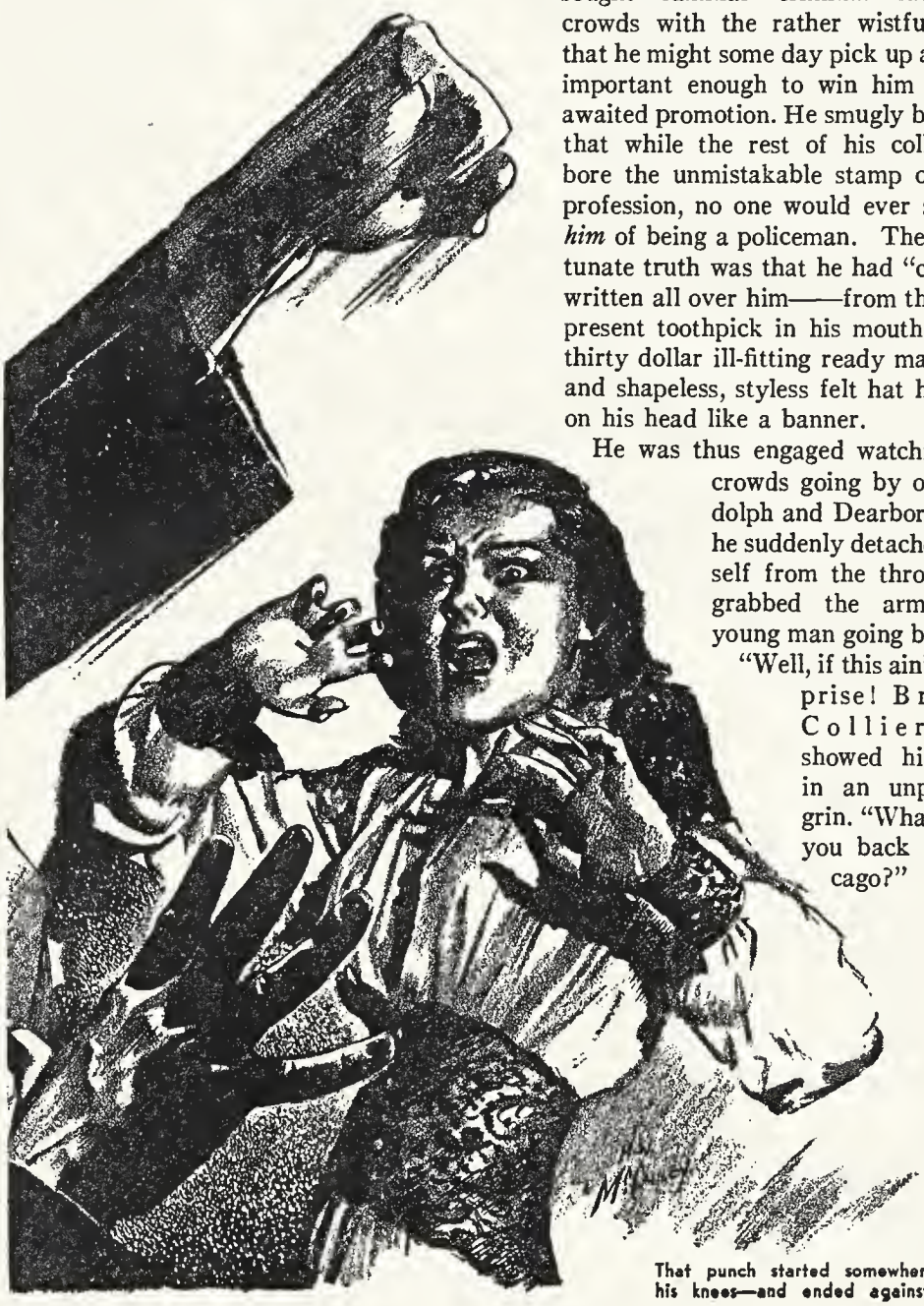
Brandy Collier learned one fact: Don't visit your old home town if its police hate your guts!

by PHILLIP SHARP

DETECTIVE SERGEANT LUKE BURMEISTER was completely wedded to his calling. Even when he was off duty he sought familiar criminal faces in crowds with the rather wistful hope that he might some day pick up a crook important enough to win him a long awaited promotion. He smugly believed that while the rest of his colleagues bore the unmistakable stamp of their profession, no one would ever suspect *him* of being a policeman. The unfortunate truth was that he had "copper" written all over him——from the ever-present toothpick in his mouth to the thirty dollar ill-fitting ready made suit and shapeless, styless felt hat he wore on his head like a banner.

He was thus engaged watching the crowds going by on Randolph and Dearborn when he suddenly detached himself from the throng and grabbed the arm of a young man going by.

"Well, if this ain't a surprise! Brandy Collier." He showed his teeth in an unpleasant grin. "What brings you back to Chicago?"



That punch started somewhere around his knees—and ended against his jaw

The young man whose arm he had seized was about thirty-five, well set up with a boyish, almost childish face, innocuous blue eyes and, incongruously, a cauliflower ear. He looked at Burmeister in perplexity as though he were trying to place him. All at once his face cleared.

"Holy smoke! Stop me if you've heard it before, but aren't you the famous Luke Burmeister?"

Burmeister pushed his hat further back on his head. "Sure. I didn't think you forgot me. I recognized you the minute I seen you."

"Let me see," said Collier, his choir boy face devoid of any trace of humor, "what was your business again . . .?"

"Can it, Collier," Burmesiter said, steaming a little. "You know damn well what my business is."

"Sure thing. I remember now. You use to collect garbage on Ohio street. Tell me, are you still in that racket?"

Slowly and impressively Burmeister fished his badge out of his pocket and let it lay in his palm.

"A detective, eh? Boy, you certainly could have fooled me. What are you wearing, a disguise?"

"You won't get my goat, Collier," said Burmeister, slipping the badge back in his pocket. "Prohibition is over, but you mugs are always up to some racket. I'd like to know what yours is—and what you're doing in Chicago now. This is a hot town for you. You know that."

"I don't see why it should be." He took out an expensive cigarette case.

The detective snorted. "Don't play stupid for me. You got a record as long as my winter underwear."

"Is that so?" He lighted his cigarette casually. "Where did I spend any time in prison?"

"Well—you were never convicted, but you're down on the blotter about a hundred times."

"You just kept arresting an innocent man, that's all. Otherwise I would certainly have gone to jail for something. Wouldn't you say that, detective?"

"I won't argue with you, Collier. You were a plenty smart cookie in Prohibition days and nobody was ever able to nail you. Personally I hated your guts—"

COLLIER made a pained gesture.

"But I don't care about what's gone by. Everybody knows that Midge Corkle hijacked you for about twenty-five G's in them days and it's been nice and quiet in Chicago since you left. I don't want no trouble now. Be smart and go back to where you came from."

Collier laughed. "Is that what you're worrying about? I haven't given Midge a thought in years. Take it easy, copper. I'm not here for revenge. I'm doing all right on the coast. I've got all the money I need and it's legitimate as hell. I grow oranges, man. Thousands of them. Millions maybe."

"Then what *are* you here for?" Burmeister asked with unstilled occupational suspicion.

"Just passing through on my way to New York and I got homesick for a sight of Randolph street. A one night stopover, that's all."

"You better be on the level, Collier."

"I am. Absolutely. My right hand on it. What's new around town since I left?"

"It ain't the same town," Burmeister said. "Most of the boys you knew are gone. A few are still around taking petty larceny raps. Midge Corkle's done all right for himself. He owns a big night club and with the gambling and everything, pulls in a healthy take. Now don't get no ideas," he added warningly.

"I'll be gone in the morning," Collier told him. "You can be with me every minute if you like."

"I wouldn't be found dead in the same morgue with you," said Burmeister. "You stay in your ball park and I'll stay in mine."

"Some other time, maybe. Say, are you sure you never hauled garbage on Ohio street? I could swear—"

"Aaah you!" said Burmeister.

THE town had changed a great deal, Brandy Collier was forced to admit. The Loop wasn't quite the same warm, throbbing place it had been in his imagination for the past ten years. Regretting the impulse that had taken him off the train in Chicago, he was vaguely dissatisfied and actively bored. His hotel room became unendurable.

He took the elevator down to the lobby. Maybe he would get a ticket for the theater. A girl was in front of him going down. He appraised her legs. Impartially, he decided they were the best he had ever seen. He followed her to the desk where she turned in her key. He was so close behind her that she stepped right into his involuntarily raised arm when she unexpectedly turned to leave.

"I beg your pardon," she gasped.

"It's a pleasure," he said, noticing that her face lived up to the promise of her legs. She had lovely features with full pouting lips and a figure that didn't depend on a corsetiere's skill for its perfection.

"Well," she said at last, scornfully. "Are we going to waltz?"

He realized his arms were still around her. Releasing her, he said, "I'm sorry, baby. Can't we sit this one out?"

She gave him a look that wilted the gardenia in his lapel and walked away without answering.

Brandy beckoned the clerk. "Who is that young lady?" he asked.

The clerk took on a knowing look. "That was Miss Galbraith. *Such* a charming girl, isn't she? She sings at the Club Allegro on the South Side."

"Club Allegro, eh?"

"Yes, sir. It's a very lively place." He lowered his voice. "They have gambling upstairs, too, if you're interested."

"I'm not. I play dominoes with old ladies for excitement."

The clerk smiled weakly. "That's a joke, isn't it, sir?"

"Yes, and not a very good one. Have a taxi for me at nine o'clock, will you. I think I'll take in a little night life."

THE Club Allegro was one of those glorified converted garages with a glittering dickey front on the outside and a ten dollar cover charge on the inside. A magnificently uniformed flunky crossed the sidewalk to open the taxi door for Brandy.

Under the blazingly alive marquee at the entrance, stood a poster display advertising the entertainment. Brandy studied the photographs, but didn't see anything that looked like his girl. The flunky came up to him.

"We got a swell show inside, mister. And the dinners—"

"I'm looking for a girl whose picture I don't see here," Brandy interrupted. "I was told she sings here."

"What's her name, do you know?"

"Galbraith, I think."

"Galbraith? I don't believe . . . Oh, wait a minute. That's Mary Galbraith. Sure. She's a table singer. Not in the regular floor show."

"That's okay with me, Jack. I'm not rating her, just looking for her."

Inside, the club was extravagantly decorated with eighth and sixteenth notes, apparently to symbolize Joy. A

hat check girl painted like jungle mural took his hat with the proper note of disdain. The head waiter popped out of nowhere.

"Do you have a reservation, sir?"

"No, any table will do."

The head waiter spread his arms in a gesture of futility. "I'm sorry, sir. There isn't a table to be had. If you had only let us know earlier—"

"Here's a reservation for the Coconut Grove in Los Angeles." He put a ten dollar bill in the other's hand. "Will that do?"

"But of course." The head waiter looked at him with faint reproach, then down at the bill to check its denomination. "This will get you in any place. A courtesy of the trade." He led him to a table off the dance floor.

The floor show was just winding up. A very tired master of ceremonies was trying to whip up a little enthusiasm for the closing act. The band was struggling with an arrangement that was just a little too tough for them, and the customers were intent on their drinking, food and table conversation.

Brandy looked idly around. At the next table was a blonde girl in a well filled, low cut evening gown that left little to the imagination. She was a haughty little icicle and looked like ready money. Her escort was a man of thirty or so, good looking in a weak, characterless way. They were both obviously straight out of the social register. They didn't seem to be enjoying themselves. Brandy wondered what was keeping them there. Every once in a while the man tried to break in on her moody silence with a conversational feeler, but she chilled him right back into silence. A nice happy couple.

THE floor show came to an end. Lights started going on. With a thrill of pleasure Brandy saw a small piano pushed on to the floor and Mary Galbraith walk over to talk to the piano player, a thin pimply faced kid.

She was wearing a slinky evening gown that clung to her like a mustard plaster. The piano player ran off a few arpeggios and she began to sing.

Her voice wasn't especially good, but she stayed in key and Brandy gave her points for trying. Nobody paid much attention to her. The table talk went on as before. When she finished the song, she started going from table to table singing requests, coming finally to the table next to his where the man and the blonde girl were sitting.

"Any special number you would like to hear?" Mary asked, throwing in an artificial smile that was strictly a tooth paste plug.

The man looked for guidance to the blonde who was buried in some private world of her own.

"Elaine," he said hesitantly. "Is there any song you'd like to hear?"

"What?" The girl looked up. "For Heaven's sake, Morgan, can't you make up your own mind about *anything!*"

"Oh, help him a little, lady," said Mary devilishly. "Make a suggestion. How about 'A Good Man is Hard to Find'?"

The haughty blonde turned on Mary. "Don't be impertinent or I'll report you to the manager."

"Please don't do that," said Mary in mock alarm. "I'm putting my old mother through a course in Diesel Engineering. This job means a lot to me."

Brandy got to his feet and joined the little group. "Sorry," he said apologetically, "but this seemed so interesting and I could hardly hear a word from where I was sitting."

Mary Galbraith recognized him. "If it isn't the boy scout I danced with in the hotel lobby!"

"We didn't finish the dance," Brandy

reminded her.

The blonde spoke up. "I wasn't aware that I was giving a party," she said icily.

"Make it a small intimate affair," Brandy urged. "Just the family and a few friends."

Quivering with anger, the girl turned to her escort. "Morgan! Are you going to allow me to be insulted? Do something."

"Elaine," he said uncomfortably, "please be reasonable. You don't want to start a scene here."

Mary broke in: "Say, I'm too popular to hang around just one table all night—even though it's been wonderful talking to you lovely people." She started to leave.

Brandy took her by the arm. "Hold on. Don't pass up your public. How about singing at my table?"

"My knight in shining armor! What would you like to hear?"

"Do you know 'The Man I Love'?"

"Know it? Why it's the story of my life." She called the song title to the piano player. She sang it for him dead pan, giving the words as little meaning as though they were in a foreign language. When she finished, she winked at him and moved on to the next table. He followed her with his eyes until his attention was distracted by the scraping of a chair at his table. He turned to face Midge Corkle sitting across from him.

CORKLE'S face was as shifty as ever, but prosperity and quasi-respectability had given him a little fleshiness and allowed him to gratify a flamboyance in clothes he had never been able to indulge before. He spoke softly, with his unwavering beady eyes on Brandy.

"Hello, Brandy," he said.

"How are you, Midge?"

"Ten years is a long time, Brandy. I knew you wouldn't forget, though."

"Forget what? What are you talking about?"

Corkle continued as though he hadn't heard the question. "You shouldn't have come back, Brandy. It was a mistake. A bad mistake." He shook his head.

Collier exploded. "I don't know what the hell you're talking about. The only reason I'm here is—" He stopped, realizing how lame the explanation would sound to Midge. "Look, Midge; I don't care about what happened ten years ago. I didn't even know you owned this place when I came in. That's square. You can take it or leave it."

Midge smiled sourly. "You used to think better on your feet. You're not going to tell me you've changed, are you? I know what you're here for. I'm no sap."

Brandy realized the futility of trying to make Corkle believe him. Well, *you* certainly haven't changed, Midge. You used to look like a starved rat—now you look like a well fed rat."

"That's better. Now you sound like the old Brandy Collier. What's the shake? Did you expect to knovk me off in my own joint?"

Brandy leaned over the table. "Don't look now, Midge. But I got my boys scattered all over the place. *There's a gun pointed at your back right now!*

Corkle straightened up in swift apprehension. Then he relaxed. "The same old Brandy. A rib, huh? I can ride along with a gag. But things are different now—no more mobs. Me, I kept a few boys just in case. . . . Just in case, Brandy."

Brandy made one last attempt to reach the man. "Look; I never was sore about the twenty-five grand you worked out of me. If I had wanted to, I could have nailed you ten years

ago. You must know that, you thick-head. I'm in the orange business now —*not pineapples*—oranges! Wrap your single cell mind around that idea and see if you can't make something out of it."

Midge Corkle shook his head admiringly. "Like always, a fast boy with the words. I don't believe you, Brandy. And if I was tempted to—well, I couldn't take a chance, could I now?" He got up. "Well, I'll be seeing you around. It's been like old times talking to you again, Brandy."

There was the usual lull between floor shows. The club was only half-filled—the couple at the next table had gone while he was talking to Midge. Brandy wondered what Midge was going to do. Starting trouble in his own place would be too raw even for Midge. He looked around the club but couldn't see a sign of any mobsters. Maybe Midge had been bluffing about having them on his payroll; still they wouldn't be hard to get at a moment's notice. The chances were that he'd be gone in the morning before Midge got set to start anything. But did he want to leave in the morning? There was Mary Galbraith—the babe was getting under his skin. Thinking of Mary made him want to see her. He called the waiter.

"I'd like to talk to the girl who sang at the tables—Miss Galbraith."

The waiter disinterestedly indicated a door near the band stand where the dressing rooms were.

BEYOND the door, Collier found himself in a short, dimly lit corridor lined with four doors on either side. He was wondering which one was Mary's, when he heard the sound of a shot. Muffled, but unmistakably a shot. Instinctively he threw himself to one side, against a door, then recovered sheepishly as he realized that the shot had come from inside a room down the hall.

He was still leaning against the door when it opened and he all but fell inside the room. Mary Galbraith was standing there in a blue kimono looking inquiringly at him.

"I see you have your own way of knocking," she said.

Brandy grinned. "Say, this is luck. I was wondering how I was going to find—say! Did you hear anything?"

"Hear anything? Hear what?"

"A shot. It came from down the hall."

She shook her head. "The only thing I heard was you howling at my door. What have you been drinking?"

Brandy stood irresolutely for a moment, then walked down the hall and opened the door. It was a small conventionally furnished office. The faint breeze blowing through the window hadn't yet cleared the room of the eye-smarting smell of cordite that was still hanging in the air. Lying on the floor, sprawled grotesquely, was Midge Corkle.

He heard a gasp behind him. Mary Galbraith was looking over his shoulder, her eyes large with horror and her fist in her mouth.

"Nobody came out of this door," Brandy said.

"There's another door—it opens into the alley."

He ran over to the door across the room and looked out into the alley. One end of the alley was lighted up from the marquee in front of the club; the other end joined a dark street. A cinch setup for a getaway, he thought grimly.

Brandy went back to look at Midge. His hand was clawed against his chest, just below where the bullet had entered his heart.

"Is he dead?" Mary asked in a small voice.

"He'll never vote again," Brandy told her. "And maybe I won't either."

"You don't mean you killed him?" Her eyes widened.

"Of course not," he said abruptly. "But from where the police sit, I'll look like the number one boy for the job."

"But why—"

"Because I had been warned by the police to stay away from Corkle. There's supposed to be bad feeling between us. I really walked into this."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. I'd be a chump to turn myself in, and yet if I run it amounts to an admission of guilt."

"There's only one thing you *can* do," Mary said decisively.

"What's that?"

"You've got to hide. If you let them catch you they won't look any further for the real killer. You can't be any worse off."

"All right, suppose I do. I'm a little out of touch in Chicago. I wouldn't know where to lay out."

"You could hide in my sister's apartment. She's out of town for a couple of weeks. Nobody would ever think of looking for you there."

"I couldn't let you involve yourself, Mary."

"I'm no starry-eyed high school kid. I know what I'm doing."

HE PUT his arms around her. "Mary you're a great kid. Everything about you is sweet, even that perfume you're wearing, but it's too much of a chance for you to take."

She pushed him away gently. "I don't wear perfume and don't worry about me. I can take care of myself. Now come on I'll give you the key to the apartment. She led him into her dressing room.

"Here," she said, handing him the key and giving him an address on the near North side. "Wait there for me. I'll be up as soon as I'm through here."

"You're an angel," he said, taking her in his arms again. This time she didn't resist.

"Don't be silly," she said. "How could I get an evening gown over a pair of wings. Now beat it. I've got to call the police and tell them about Midge.

He flipped his cigarette out of the window and kissed her effectively.

"Whew!" she said when she had got her breath. "You've been around! Now go on while I call the police.

He went out the door just as she reached for the telephone.

Brandy remembered Chicago well enough to find the address she had given him without much trouble. It was a compact apartment building near the lake. The front door yielded to the same key as the apartment. He let himself in and upstairs without being seen. It was a frilly, feminine place. He looked around restlessly for a radio or a newspaper, then realizing suddenly that his prowling might be heard below, took off his shoes and threw himself on the divan. He was sound asleep in five minutes.

He had hardly gone to sleep it seemed, when he was awakened by a cautious tapping on the door. He waited. The tap was repeated.

"Who is it?" he whispered.

"Mary. Open up."

He swung off the divan in his stocking feet and let her in.

"What happened?" he asked. "Did the law show up while you were there?"

Without a word she handed him a newspaper.

He opened it and there, on the front page, a picture of himself stared out at him. An enlargement of a snapshot

taken years ago at a political picnic. The story was written sensationally with little regard for truth. It told of his many arrests without mentioning he had never served a sentence; it described the well known enmity that had existed between him and Corkle, hinting darkly at gang feuds flaring up again; and they gave a reasonably accurate account of his movements up till the time he had been seen going into the corridor that led to Corkle's office. Most damaging, were his finger prints which had been found on the door-knob leading to the alley. All in all it looked pretty damning. A city wide hunt was in progress and the police gave their customary assurance that his capture was a matter of hours. He threw the paper disgustedly to a side.

With a strange look, Mary said, "I didn't know you were a gangster."

He glanced up swiftly. "Now just a minute, Mary. It isn't what it sounds at all. Everything they say here happened ten years ago. I was a tough giddy kid who saw a quick easy way to make a lot of money. I'll admit I ran a little booze in those days, but it didn't seem a criminal thing to do at the time. Since then, I've been growing oranges in California—a very respectable and highly thought of business. You probably drink orange juice yourself."

"I always get Florida oranges," she said. "But don't get me wrong. I don't care what you are. You just don't look the part of a gangster, that's all."

He smiled. "They used to call me the Diaper Kid. I was the youngest—Hello! Remember her?" He had been carelessly turning the pages of the newspaper and in the society column come upon a picture of the girl and man who had sat at the adjoining table at the Club Allegro. The caption under the picture announced the engagement of the socially prominent Elaine Derwent to the no less socially prominent Morgan Grant. There were several columns of genealogical details.

MARY glanced at the paper. "Sure I remember her. Elaine Derwent and her portable doormat."

"You mean you've seen her before tonight?" asked Brandy.

"Of course. She's at the club nearly every night. But she's upstairs in the gambling rooms most of the time."

"She's a frigid bundle all right. The poor guy has my sympathy."

"Well, if money will make them happy they both have plenty. I imagine she spends more on cologne than I do on—"

Brandy leaped to his feet. "Cologne! That's it! Oh, what a chump I've been!"

"What's the matter?" asked Mary, startled by his outburst. "What's biting you? What did I say?"

"Tell me," Brandy demanded excitedly, "you didn't wear any perfume tonight, did you?"

"No, I never use it, but what—"

"Then that's it, baby. Do you remember I mentioned your perfume in Corkle's office?"

"Yes, I remember. But I thought you were just talking."

"No, I smelled perfume, all right. And I just remembered *it was the same stuff I got a whiff of at Elaine Derwent's table!*"

"But that doesn't prove anything. Anybody might be using the same brand."

"Not expensive stuff like this Derwent dame would be likely to use."

Mary's eyes shone. "Oh, Brandy! And this might be something too. It's common gossip at the club that Elaine Derwent owes Midge Corkle a lot of

gambling money."

He snapped his fingers. "That settles it. And to think I was going to be fall guy for that society broad."

"But they'll never take your word against hers. Can you prove it?"

Brandy started putting on his shoes "I've got an idea. It might work. It's got to work."

Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Just keep the home fires burning, honey, and pray that I don't fall on my puss. I'll be back." The door closed behind him.

"Good luck, Brandy," she called after him.

There was an all night restaurant down the street. He looked in. The place was almost empty and he observed with satisfaction that there was a phone booth in the rear. He thumbed through the phone book for Luke Burmeister's number. Luck was with him. Burmeister's sleepy voice came over the wire. "Hello."

Brandy spoke rapidly into the mouthpiece. "Burmeister, wake up. This is Brandy Collier."

THERE was a moment of shocked silence, then, "Where are you calling from—the station?"

"No, I'm still on the loose. Listen, Burmeister, you know I didn't freeze Corkle, don't you?"

"No I don't," growled the detective. "This is one rap you're not going to beat, Collier."

"Look, you flat-head flatfoot, would I be sticking my neck out to call you if I wasn't in the clear?"

"I don't know what you're up to—you're pretty cagey. You'd better tell me where you're calling from and let me come down and get you."

"You'd love that, wouldn't you, Brandy jeered. "It happens that I had nothing to do with the killing Corkle. But I think I can help you nail the killer. Are you interested?"

"Sure I'm interested. But don't think I'm so simple. You're the baby I'm pinning this job on."

"Burmeister, if you'll meet me tonight, I'll take you to the killer—and let you make the pinch. You can have all the credit. It will mean a sure promotion for you."

Burmeister wavered. The shot about a promotion had hit home. Brandy pressed his advantage.

"And if I don't deliver the goods, you'll still have me. You know I never welshed on my word. Come on, what do you say?"

"You're hotter than a three dollar pistol, Collier. If I was caught with you—"

"You could say you were bringing me in. Will you meet me at Oak and Michigan?"

Burmeister capitulated. "Okay," he said. "But if this falls through, I'm taking you in. Don't forget that."

Brandy walked down darkened side streets to get to the meeting place. Except for the automobile traffic on the boulevard, Oak and Michigan was deserted. He waited forty-five minutes before a disgruntled Burmeister showed up.

"I must be outa my mind," the detective complained. "Getting up in the middle of the night to meet a lunatic. The more I think of it, the less I see how anyone but you coulda done it."

"I'll convince you," Brandy promised him. "Here's the setup. He quickly explained how he had found Corkle and what he knew about Elaine Derwent.

"It's something," Burmeister admitted, "but not too much to go on. Not enough to arrest the dame, anyway."

"I know. But if you and I went up there like we knew something, put on

a big front, I think she'd break."

"Bust in on her!" Burmeister erupted. "You're nuts! Just plain ordinary nuts! What you need is one of them new model double breasted straight jackets. And on you it would look good."

Brandy spoke urgently. "I know it sounds wild, but I tell you the dame is guilty as hell, and she'll buy it. I know she will."

"She'll yell copper the minute she recognizes your puss from the picture in the paper."

"My mother wouldn't recognize that picture. It's ten years old and a bad picture at that. Listen, Burmeister, I *know* that Elaine Derwent snagged Midge and I think she's tearing herself apart worrying about it right now. Think of all the publicity you'd get bringing in a girl from the social register. Why, it would make headlines in every paper in the country. I wouldn't be surprised if you jumped up two grades. And you always have me to fall back on . . . How about it?"

"Well," said Burmeister, weakening, "I said I'd try it—"

"Then you'll do it?"

"Yeah," he said dismally. "But God help you if this goes sour."

THE Derwent house was one of those tight little yardless mansions off Michigan boulevard. A few minutes after they rang the bell, a sleepy butler in a dressing gown opened the door.

"We want to see Miss Elaine Derwent," said Brandy.

"She's been in bed for hours. Do you know what time it is?" the man asked indignantly.

"Sure. We tell time by the stars. Straighten out, Jack, we're the law." Brandy pushed his way into the house over the spluttering protests of the butler, followed by a heavy-footed Burmeister. "Where does she sleep? Come on, *talk!*" He seized the man by the collar of his robe.

"Upstairs—second door—right," the butler choked out.

Burmeister followed Brandy up the circular staircase. "Here's where we go into our act. Make it good," Brandy whispered.

Burmeister nodded. They knocked once and went in without waiting for a "come in".

Elaine Derwent was sitting on the bed wearing an all but transparent nightgown, struggling into a negligee that was about as opaque as a plate glass window. She faced them, trembling—but whether with fear or anger, Brandy couldn't tell.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion!" she demanded—a little theatrically, Brandy thought.

Mechanically, as prearranged, Burmeister flashed his badge.

Her hands went to her breast. "The police? Why?"

"Miss Derwent," Brandy said, "This is a little irregular, but we would like to ask you a few questions. Just routine."

"At this hour?" she asked chillingly.

"Murderers don't operate by time clocks, Miss Derwent."

"Murder!"

"Yes, murder. Now do you understand?"

"I'm not sure that I do. What do you wish to know?"

"You were at the Club Allegro earlier tonight?"

"Yes. I go there frequently. Is that criminal?"

"Do you know that Midge Corkle was murdered at the club tonight?"

"Yes, I saw it in the paper."

"Can you think of anyone who might have a motive for killing Corkle? Any special reason for wanting him out of

the way?"

She bit her lip. "No I can't. These are peculiarly pointless questions. In fact, they are offensive. Why have you come to me?"

Brandy ignored her question. "Tell me, Miss Derwent," he said, "when you left the club tonight, you went out by the front entrance didn't you?"

"Of course, the doorman will remember that."

"Then why did you come back a few minutes later through the alley a block away?"

She turned pale. "That's nonsense." She spoke through tightened throat muscles.

"And you were very careful about finger prints, but left a heavy odor of perfume that hung around the place like a blanket. Honestly, wasn't that pretty stupid, Miss Derwent? The science of criminal detection is wonderfully advanced and a thing like a perfume odor can be picked up and recorded like a finger print. Isn't that so, Sergeant?"

"Yeah," said Burmeister.

"You also made the mistake of having a partner. I guess you know how long your boy friend Grant will stand up under a grilling. Don't you agree, Sergeant?' '

"Yeah," said Buremister.

"Altogether," Brandy went on, "I would say you and Grant could be considered an entry for the Hot Seat Derby. Wouldn't you say that, Sergeant?"

"Yeah," said Burmeister. Then, padding his part, he added, "I would."

"And it wouldn't surprise me," Brandy said, "if a search here wouldn't dig up the pistol you used. Why don't you be nice, and give out with the truth?"

The girl's haughty reserve broke down completely. She sank down on the bed and started to cry softly.

BRANDY looked at Burmeister who was regarding the girl with stolid detachment. Then, turning back to Elaine Derwent, he said gently, "Tell us the whole story. There must have been a good reason for killing Corkle."

She looked up horror stricken, her face tear stained.

"Oh, no! I didn't—I didn't! I was there—in his office, but I didn't kill him."

"Who did, then?" demanded Brandy. "Grant?"

"I don't know," she said helplessly. "I had gone to see Mr. Corkle . . ."

"Why?"

"Because I had lost a great deal of money gambling with him. I owed him quite a bit and he was threatening to tell my guardian, who is terribly old-fashioned and would have cut off my allowance at the faintest hint of any scandal. I was beside myself with worry. Then, tonight, Mr. Corkle called me on the telephone and told me to see him at the club. He was very nice, very pleasant. It was as though he had had a complete change of heart. He gave me directions to come to his office through the alley—and to come alone."

"But you were with Grant tonight."

"Yes, I was afraid to go there alone, so I asked Morgan to come along. Then I realized that I would never gain anything by antagonizing Corkle, so I had dinner in the club with Morgan and after we left, I had him drive around the block so I could go to the office through the alley while he waited in the car."

"Go on. What happened then?"

"I found Corkle in the office. He seemed very happy. We had hardly started talking when there was a shot. He—he fell to the floor."

"Are you sure you were alone in the room with him?"

"I thought so at the time. I still think so. It seems to me now, that the shot came from the window."

"The window, eh?" Brandy rubbed his chin thoughtfully. Then, "I saw in the paper this evening that you were going to marry Grant. It was obvious to me that you weren't in love with him. Why the sudden change of heart?"

"What else could I do?" she said flatly. "It was the price he demanded for keeping quiet about tonight. You *must* believe me!"

"It's a funny thing, but I do, Miss Derwent," said Brandy.

"Hey, what's that!" said Burmeister startled. "You told me this dame—"

"I know, Burmeister, I know. But my noggin wasn't functioning when I told you that. I was being played for a chump. *Now I know who killed Corkle!*"

Collier, you're pulling a fast one—"

"This is on the level. I promised you the killer tonight and I'll keep my word."

"I've had enough," said Burmeister. You wanted me to be an amateur detective and I played ball with you. But this is it. I'm taking you in, Collier."

"All right," said Brandy, apparently resigned. "But I—" With electrifying swiftness he threw a punch out of nowhere to Burmeister's jaw and caught him before he slumped unconscious to the floor. Brandy laid the inert figure on the bed.

"Miss Derwent," he said. "You were almost framed for Corkle's murder. I know who did it. Will you help me out?"

"Anything," she said fervently. "Anything."

"When this lug comes to, give him this address and tell him to get there right away. I'll be there waiting for him." He gave her Mary's address. "If he wakes up before ten minutes, stall before you give him the address. I want at least a ten minute start. Will you do it?"

She smiled at him. "Yes, I will. And take care of yourself."

"Does it make any difference to you?" he asked.

"I'm always concerned about the men who run in and out of my bedroom," she said.

BRANDY was lucky enough to get a cruising taxi in front of the house. Ten minutes later, he was knocking at the apartment door where he had left Mary. She threw open the door.

"Any luck?" she asked eagerly. She had changed to a hostess coat that did magic things with her figure.

"A little," Brandy said. "She says she didn't kill Corkle, though." He walked into the apartment, tossing his hat on the sofa.

"Naturally she wouldn't admit it. What did she say?"

"She said she was in the office when the shot was fired and got a glimpse of the person who fired through the window."

"But she couldn't have! Her back was towards the—"

Brandy laughed. "You little witch! Falling for a routine with whiskers. And I thought you were smart."

"It was kind of dumb, wasn't it?" she said, smiling without mirth. "Whatever made you suspect a nice kid like me?"

"I never would have, but you slipped up on details."

"Like what?

"Like saying you didn't hear the shot when your window facing the alley, and Corkle's window, ten feet from yours, were both open. You'd have to be deaf not to hear it. And all the time you were trying to get me to

take a powder, I thought you were worrying about me. Isn't that a laugh?"

"The more the merrier. I couldn't have too many suspects. I really planted the Derwent dame, but you fitted in beautifully. I couldn't have planned it better."

"But why kill Corkle? I know he didn't have much personality—"

"That's where you're wrong. I loved Midge. Too much, I suppose. He was tired of me and starting to make a play for Elaine Derwent. I wouldn't stand for that. I saw her sneak into the alley entrance to Midge's office. I went into the alley from my dressing room and shot him through his open window. I got back to my room just in time to hear you at my door."

"I'm sorry for you, Mary," said Brandy, taking a step toward her. "You're a lovely dish, but you can't be trusted to play with other children. You play too rough."

"Stand back!" A small wicked automatic was in her hand. "What do you think you're going to do?"

"It kills me, but I'm going to turn you over to the police."

"It's going to kill you, all right. You fool! Do you think I'd pass up an opportunity to have the police find your body—very dead—*killed with the same gun you used on poor Midge!* I'll be the poor girl who was protecting her honor. Pretty logical, isn't it?"

She raised the gun. There was a knock at the door. She turned her body slightly, moving the gun at the same time. As Brandy dove for her, she hastily fired without aiming. The shot shattered a wall mirror. Then he had her.

Burmeister burst into the room just as Brandy knocked the struggling girl cold with a clip on the jaw.

"A fellow can't always live up to Emily Post," he said to Burmeister who was staring at the unconscious girl.

"Someday, somebody is gonna duck that Sunday punch of yours, Collier," Burmeister said.

"Here's the killer and here's the gun she used on Corkle. She'll talk. Now what do you say?"

"Boy, she's a pretty doll. What did she want to get mixed up in a murder for?"

Brandy shook his head sadly. "She drank the wrong kind of orange juice. Florida oranges sneak up on you that way."

DIAMOND POISONING

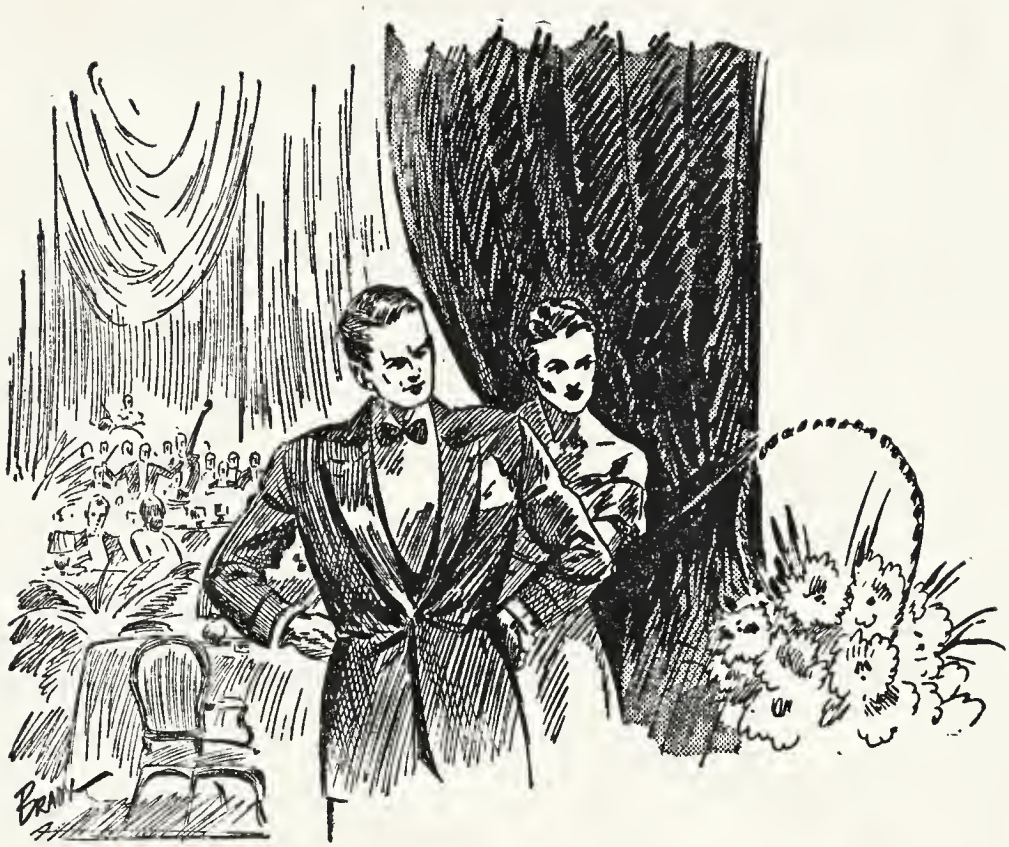
CURIOUSLY enough, there was a time in the history of man that diamond dust was dreaded as a fatal poison. While Benevenuto Cellini, the adventurer and goldsmith, the artist and rogue, was imprisoned in Rome, in 1538, he strongly suspected that his enemies were seeking to poison him by tampering with his food. Cellini shared the helief of his contemporaries that there was no more deadly polson than diamond dust.

One day, while eating his noonday meal, he felt something grate hetween his teeth. He paid no particular attentlon to this, hut when he had finished eating his eye was caught hy some hright particles on the plate. Picking up one of these and examining it carefully, he was terrified to find what he supposed to he a diamond splinter, and he straightway gave himself up for lost, thinking that he had swallowed a quantity of the dreaded diamond dust.

He prayed to God for an hour and finally hecame reconciled to the thought of dying, hut suddenly it occurred to him that he had not tested the hardness of the fragment found in hls food. He immediately took the splinter and tried to crush it between his knife and the stone on the windowsill. To his joy and relief, the attempt succeeded, and he became convinced that what he had swallowed was not diamond dust.

But the prisoner's fears were not without foundation. Later, after his release, Cellini learned that an enemy had given a diamond to a certain Lione Aretino, a gem-cutter, instructing him to grind it up so that the dust could be placed in Cellini's food. The gem-cutter was very poor and the diamond was worth a hundred *scudi,* so the man yielded to temptation and substituted a citrine for a diamond. And it was to this substitution that Cellini attrihuted his escape from death!

—Pete Boggs



IN THE back room of Bahout's coffee shop the unending poker game went on. A broken down old phonograph played a wailing Syrian record. The singer—"Buckya greater than Caruso" as the older Syrians said—sounded like a cow lost in a quarry. I didn't laugh, though . . . it wouldn't have been healthy.

There were seven of them around the table, and a jug of *Otta*—a Syrian hooch that tastes like licorice—made the rounds steadily. None of the seven was drunk.

I looked over my Uncle Shpinay's shoulder. He had a pair of treys in the hole and his first card up was a trey. Gage, the tailor, had an ace and he bet a nickel. Everybody paid and when it came to my uncle, he thought, shrugged his huge shoulders sadly and tossed in a nickel, too.

My uncle's next card was a trey and now had the only pair on board. His bronzed features took on a worried expression and he ran a big hand through his white hair. "I check," he said.

Everybody else checked too and on the next draw he was still high man. He shook his head and checked again. They let it ride all the way around. My uncle smiled with seeming relief.

On the fifth card Gage caught another ace and the man under my uncle had a pair of sevens. Gage checked and it rode around through the sevens to my uncle, who checked again. The sixth card improved no one's hand and they all checked.

The seventh card was down and the

Uncle Takes a Hand

by H. B. HICKEY

Once more, Uncle Shpinay proves he has more in that handsome head of his than an ability to sell cheap linens . . .

There was no doubt about it: my own uncle had joined forces with my worst enemy

same thing happened again. Gage looked at my uncle and said, "Buckya, what you got?" My uncle said nothing. The man with the sevens said to Gage, "Wellacka, what *you* got?"

Gage pointed to his aces. "Beat 'em," he said in his hoarse voice.

The other, a thin dark man, said, "I got three sevens."

Gage turned over another ace.

The thin man turned up a pair of fives.

Gage showed a pair of eights to make it aces full. No one said anything.

My uncle looked at his four treys and picked up the loose cards on the table and shuffled them all together. As though to himself he muttered, "A pair of threes."

Gage picked up the money on the table after Bahout had subtracted a nickel and looked at my Uncle Shpinay. My uncle took all the cards and stacked them together and then neatly tore the deck in half. "I pay you for the cards tomorrow," he said calmly to Bahout.

Uncle Shpinay got up without looking around at me. "Let us go, Sidney," he said. How he knew I had been standing behind him was beyond me.

OUTSIDE, I started to laugh at him. "That's playing them a little *too* close to the belly," I said.

He smiled wryly. "It was the principle of the thing," he explained. "Gage should have bet his three aces and the man with the sevens should have raised. Then, when each caught his full house, they should have raised and re-raised."

I knew what would happen then. My Uncle Shpinay would have smiled benevolently and bellowed, "Up! Up!" and shoved all his change into the center of the table. It would have been a lot of fun.

"By the way," he asked, "how is it that you are in the old neighborhood today?"

"I came over to have lunch with my mother," I told him.

"And how is your mother, that angel? And you father, that prince?"

"When did you see them last?" I asked in return.

"I had breakfast there this morning," he admitted.

I started to get into my car, which was at the curb, and he stopped me. "Wait," he said.

He went back into the coffee shop and came out lugging two big sample cases. "Some linens which have just arrived from the old country," he explained. "I think they will be safer at your office."

He dumped the cases into the car and got in after them. There wasn't much room left for me in the coupe but he didn't seem to mind.

"And how is business at the Villa Rouge?" he asked.

"Business is all right but the future looks black," I said.

Uncle Shpinay was honestly concerned. "That is too bad." He smiled cheerfully then. "I am sure that with your intelligence you will be able to surmount any obstacles in your path."

"I'm not in the market for linens so save your compliments," he said. "Besides, there isn't anything I can do about this."

He was waiting for me to tell what it was. "It's the election that's coming up," I said.

"Why should that worry you? You contribute to both parties, do you not?"

"Sure," I said, "but that won't help me this time. The inside dope is that there's going to be a reform mayor. The machine can't stop him from being nominated. And the worst of it is that this guy is against *everything!*"

"But you run an honest game," Uncle Shpinay protested.

"And I serve the best food in town," I added. "But that cuts no ice with Phineas Murtagh. He's the kind of a guy that's got all the dough anybody would need, but he still wears a silk hat that's as old as I am and a black suit that's older. He's a big wheel in church affairs in this town and that's where his power comes from."

"A repressed character who vents his frustrations on others," Uncle Shpinay said.

I said, "Huh?"

"A book I have been reading," my uncle explained. "Not a truly religious type at all."

"I don't care what type he is. If he's elected I'll have to go back to sneaking bets in a handbook."

"Which reminds me," Uncle Shpinay interrupted, "I have worked out a seven horse parlay for a dollar. I would like your opinion on it."

"Oh what's the use talking to you," I snarled.

WE PULLED up in front of the Villa Rouge and I paused for a minute to admire it. You can't blame me. I ran it up from a dive to an institution. Shady characters are kept out and I don't serve drinks to minors. Percentage makes my dough for me without my having to cheat. Even the doorman's uniform is clean.

Mike, the doorman, looked at my uncle carrying his cases. He came forward and said, "May I help you?"

"Are you looking to get ruptured?" I barked. Those cases were as heavy as if they were loaded with lead. I knew from experience. Each case was stuffed with enough linen to outfit a hotel.

Mike held the door open wide so my uncle could get his cases and his shoulders through and we went in and stopped at the checkroom. Uncle Shpinay stowed his stuff in a corner and turned to chuck Marie under her chin.

"Where've you been lately?" I heard her ask in a hurt tone.

"Important business," he said mysteriously. "Have you missed me?"

I walked away so I wouldn't have to listen to the rest of it. He never spent a dime on them but the girls were all crazy about him. I hope I'm half as good when I'm his age.

Pierre was waiting for me in my office upstairs. He gave me the dope on the dinner menu and it sounded so good I almost felt like eating.

"For you, Mr. Mahane," Pierre said, "I have prepared a surprise. Tonight you weel have *sheesh habab!*"

"I thought you were a French chef," I said.

"Your uncle gave me the recipe. Zere weel be for him too."

Naturally, I said to myself.

Then Diane came in and took my mind off food. "Frank called from downstairs," she told me. "He says trouble just breezed in."

"Why can't I have a minute's peace?" I wanted to know. "Tell Frank to get rid of the guy in a nice way."

"I've already suggested that to Frank," Diane said. She's got brains besides being beautiful. "He says you better come down and handle this yourself."

"Dammit!" I yelled. "I'm supposed to handle the big stuff around here. Don't I pay the help enough so they'll do something once in a while? Why do I have to do everything myself?"

"Because you're the boss, Sid," Diane said. "And that's *why* you're the boss."

The way she said it made me feel good. I felt the red go out of my face and I went out of the office like a lamb. Like a lamb to the slaughter.

A tall black hat was the first thing I saw. Frank was standing in front of it but he couldn't hide the tall, thin

man under the hat. If Murtagh wore a shawl he would have looked like Lincoln, only there was no kindness or love in his face. It was a thin face, with a thin beak of a nose, and it was a mean face.

Naturally I had checked up on him as soon as I'd first heard he was going to run for mayor. That's an important part of my business. The only thing anyone had to say about him was that he'd made his dough by always buying at one-third the price he sold for. Also, he was supposed to have the first buck he'd ever made. Looking at him, I could believe it.

"No trouble, I hope," I said as pleasantly as I could. Sometimes I wished I was back running crap games again. In those days I knew how to handle anyone who got in my hair. Now I couldn't afford a scene.

MURTAGH favored me with a glare from his fanatical pale blue eyes. "You are the proprietor of this den of vice and iniquity, I presume."

I had to admit I was. "Well, there is no trouble now," he continued, "but you may rest assured that there will be!"

I said, "Look. I run a nice place. Nobody has ever been cheated here."

He was shocked. "A nice place? A place where the sustenance of widows and orphans is gambled away!"

Now what's the use talking to anyone like that? Widows and orphans! Why, the cheapest dinner we have is ten bucks and we use nothing but blue chips in the gambling rooms! That's a figure of speech, of course.

Murtagh was intent on making a speech. "If the poor benighted people who come here to be corrupted do not have the moral power to resist temptation then it shall be my duty to remove that temptation!"

My uncle Shpinay had come up behind Murtagh and was watching the proceedings with interest. At this point, he said softly:

"*'Vice is monster of such hideous mien That to be hated needs but to be seen'.*"

Phineas Murtagh whirled and stared at him but my uncle's face was solemn.

"And how does a man with those sentiments come to be in a gambling den?" Murtagh asked suspiciously.

Uncle Shpinay's eyes grew wide. "A gambling den, sir? I was told that this was a restaurant! No doubt my informant thought to play a practical joke on me."

He looked Murtagh squarely in the eye. "Of course I should not think of dining here. Would you be so kind as to direct me to a more respectable eating place?"

I almost went through the floor! My collar got tight and I started to tell him off but he interrupted me.

"And you are the proprietor? For shame, sir. For shame!" He took Murtagh's arm. For a moment it seemed that the man in the black hat didn't want to leave but the pressure was too strong to be resisted.

"Let us leave this terrible place, sir," Uncle Shpinay said to Murtagh.

As they walked toward the door my uncle kept talking. "It is most fortunate that I should meet you, sir. I am a stranger in town; an importer of fine linens here on business. Nothing but trouble have I had since I came. Unfair rates of exchange and unexpected import duties are forcing me to take great losses."

I saw Murtagh's ears perk up at that but Uncle Shpinay kept right on talking. As they went out the door I heard him say, "It is too bad that men like you, sir, are not the leaders of our communities rather than the voices of conscience."

"My own uncle! I wanted to tell

Marie to get Mike and have him throw out my uncle's cases. It was good thing Frank called me to sign a tab for a guy from the city hall or I would have busted a blood vessel.

Maybe Uncle Shpinay would be out of my hair for a few days, I hoped. I should have known better. He was back in time for his dinner. When he came into the office I was just starting to eat.

HE ACTED as though there was nothing wrong. "Just in the proverbial nick of time, I see," he smiled. For a few seconds he looked at the food on the desk with disappointment.

"You forgot to order the wine, Sidney," he chided me.

I almost choked. "You've got a lot of nerve," I yelled. "My own uncle should pull a stunt like that! If Murtagh gets himself elected mayor you'll be getting your dinners in a hamburger joint."

Uncle Shpinay stared at me with his mouth full of food. "But Sidney!" he protested, "you should not confuse business with family loyalty. It was plain to me that the estimable gentleman is the type who would make a good customer for linens. There is no doubt that he has not purchased any in years."

"Estimable gentleman," I snorted. "You said yourself that he's nothing but a fraud. He just wants to drive honest people out of business so that nobody can have a good time."

My uncle nodded. "What you say is true. However I meant estimable in the sense that he has not squandered his money. Therefore he is in a position to take advantage of my present difficulties. He looks at it in the light of helping me out of a tight situation."

Uncle Shpinay looked at me. "I do have some exceptional values which have just come from the old country, Sidney. If you find yourself in need of linens at the moment . . ."

"I know your linens," I told him. "They fall apart the first time they're washed." I began to warm up. "And furthermore, if you think you can play me against that fugitive from a mausoleum you're crazy!"

"You misjudge me, my boy," Uncle Shpinay said with a straight face. "Do you think I would attempt to coerce my own nephew into buying linens from me?"

"Yes," I said.

He smiled at me warmly. "I have always said that you have great insight as well as rare business acumen. You will no doubt go far."

"How far is the gutter?" I asked. "Because that's where I'll be if your new pal is elected."

"Tut, tut, Sidney! Hope for the best." The wine had come up and Uncle Shpinay drank a whole glass of it to wash down his dinner. Then he arose:

"Do you by chance have a stick of gum?" he asked. "Mr. Murtagh has invited me to his home this evening to meet a committee from the temperance society and I should not like to have alcohol on my breath."

"Would you like to borrow a few hundred so you can contribute to his campaign fund?" I snarled.

Uncle Shpinay liked that crack. As he came around the desk and put his arm around my shoulder his deep laughter boomed out like a reverberating drum.

"You have a true sense of humor," he laughed. "But speaking of money . . . Mr. Murtagh's home is at the other end of the city. I should like to take a taxi, but unfortunately I left my wallet at home." He looked at me expectantly.

What could I do?

WITH the primaries only a week away I was plenty busy. Everybody and his brother wanted money. Then there were the presents for all the politicians' wives. At least, Diane took that off my hands. We gave away plenty of free meals too. Every time some petty ward heeler came in I took the check. I was beginning to feel like a Christmas basket.

And a lot of good it was going to do me! All those things were in the hope that a miracle would happen and if there is one thing I know from experience, it's the odds against a miracle.

Two days before the election I talked to the mayor on the phone.

"How does it look?" I asked him.

He told me in one word. "Bad."

"That's a hot one," I groaned. "Who's running this election?"

"Listen, Sid," he told me. "This is one of those things. Murtagh and his crowd have got the women's vote sewed up and there isn't a thing we can do about it. If you can find any takers you can bet he'll win in a walk."

"Why don't you get yourself a pall-bearer's outfit and see if you can beat him at his own game?" I cracked.

"With my belly?" The mayor laughed. "We've just got to take it philosophically, that's all. About three weeks after he's in office the voters are going to be sorry they ever elected him. The guy is strictly a crack-pot. Then, in four years, the wheel will turn and we'll be in again."

He hung up before I could ask him if he wanted to hold his breath that long. I put down the phone disgustedly and found my uncle Shpinay in the office watching me. Despite his size my uncle could move as silently as a cat.

"*Keefik,*" he greeted me. I didn't bother to say hello.

"And how is your mother, that lovely creature? And your father, that charming fellow?"

I wasn't in the mood for his Syrian formalities. "And how is your buddy, that skinflint reformer?" I barked.

Uncle Shpinay smiled with great humor. "Enjoying the prospect of victory over the dark forces of evil," he chuckled.

"You act like you were going to be his commissioner of imported linens," I sneered.

"The Prophet has said that a man who jokes in adversity will not remain there long," my uncle said cheerfully.

He helped himself to a cigar from my desk humidor and held it up to the light. "Clear Havana," Uncle Shpinay said to himself. "You are a man of excellent taste, Sidney. It happens that some exquisite things—which you are just the one to appreciate—have arrived from the old country . . ."

"Ha!" I sneered, "why don't you sell them to your pal Murtagh?"

UNCLE SHPINAY became haughty. "Mr. Murtagh is not one to be interested in small transactions. We are in the process of negotiating the importation of large quantities of hand-made linens from Syria. Since the work will be done by women and children at slave wages, Mr. Murtagh anticipates a goodly profit."

"You'd sell your own mother down the river for a half a buck," I told him.

"How can you say such a thing, my boy? You know I would do anything for you!"

"Even do business with the man who's going to close me up!"

Uncle Shpinay adopted his philosophical tone. "Well, even Mr. Murtagh feels morality and business should not be mixed. And he is a very good man, as you know."

"I hope you lose your shirt on the deal," I said. "I hope that very good

man is good enough to trim you."

My uncle held up two fingers very close together. "We are like that; the best of friends. He would not think of such a thing."

He gave me another beaming smile and stuffed four more cigars into his vest pocket. "Several other importers and I are meeting with Mr. Murtagh at his home tomorrow," he informed me. "I must go now to make the arrangements."

I refused to say goodbye to my uncle but it didn't bother him in the least. After he had left and closed the door behind him I reached for the humidor. Maybe a cigar would calm me. The humidor was empty! Uncle Shpinay had taken my last cigar. I threw the humidor against the wall and sat there cursing.

The rest of the evening went from bad to worse. I had to go to the safe twice because one of my best customers hit a winning streak at the roulette wheel. Then he had the brains to quit when he started losing. Later it turned out that he had left because his wife had gone to the hospital to have a baby. Which shows that the wise boys are right; you can't beat the law of nature.

At five o'clock I finally went to bed but I couldn't sleep well and I was up at eleven. I went over to the city hall and found the mayor reading a travel folder. That didn't put me in a better humor.

I hardly felt like going to the Villa Rouge. By dawdling around and spending an hour at the gym I managed to kill most of the afternoon. When I finally got to the office I found that Diane had picked up the humidor and filled it with cigars. There was a vase of fresh flowers on my desk too.

I was telling Diane how much I appreciated her when Uncle Shpinay came in. She jumped from my lap.

"Why don't you knock before you come in?" I demanded.

MY UNCLE set down the two cases he was carrying. "The door is open," he reminded me pleasantly. His eyes dropped to the humidor and he opened it.

"Take lots; take one," I said before he could reach.

Just for that he took a half dozen. Then he sat down on the couch and lit one and blew smoke rings for a few minutes without speaking.

"How is your—" he started to say.

"Everybody's fine except me," I interrupted.

Uncle Shpinay smiled. "We all have our bad days," he comforted me. He looked around the office. "You have a fine office," he commented.

"Yeah, it'll be a shame to leave it."

My uncle shrugged. "A man of your ability and intelligence will have no difficulty in getting along," he told me. "By the way, Sidney, how is business?"

"If I thought you really cared I might tell you," I said.

He chuckled as though I had said something funny.

I said, "I'm glad to see you're in such a good humor. How is your business?"

"I am happy you asked. A new shipment has just—"

"I mean with Murtagh," I snapped.

Uncle Shpinay shrugged but kept smiling. "It was not fated to be," he said. He took a newspaper from his pocket and started to read it but I wasn't going to let him off so easy.

"That's too bad," I grinned. "So the deal fell through."

"Unfortunately, yes," Uncle Shpinay said, putting his paper down. "I am happy that you take such an interest in my affairs, unimportant as they must

seen to a man in your position."

"Not at all," I assured him. "Please give me the details."

UNCLE SHPINAY beamed at me. "You are indeed a prince," he said. "But to put it shortly, events occurred which so greatly disturbed Mr. Murtagh that we were forced to cease our negotiations. It was most unfortunate."

He didn't look unhappy enough so I needled him some more. "Tell me all about it," I urged.

He nodded. "We had all met at Mr. Murtagh's home, as I told you we would. Just as our conversation started Mr. Murtagh and I were called away. The others decided to while away the time we were gone by playing cards. By chance one of them had a deck in his pocket."

"And Murtagh caught them at it and threw you all out," I said hopefully.

Uncle Shpinay seemed to think that was funny. "It was worse than that. Some rascally person called the police and they raided the house and arrested all these businessmen for gambling. The money was on the table."

He shook his head sadly. "I am afraid it will ruin Mr. Murtagh politically. The story is in the latest paper."

I snatched the paper out of his hands. The story was on the front page. "By chance" there had been a photographer with the police and there was a big picture of the men seated around the table with their money stacked before them.

The picture drew my interest and I looked at it closely. The man at the far end of the table was Gage, the tailor! Next to him sat Bahout!

I caught on fast. When I looked up my uncle Shpinay had picked up his cases and was preparing to leave.

"Wait a second," I said. "If you and Murtagh hadn't been called away this wouldn't have happened."

Uncle Shpinay smiled. "That is fate. As it turned out, the call was a mistake and we need not have gone."

"Where are you going now?" I asked.

Uncle Shpinay shrugged. "I have lost a good customer. Now I must go and drum up some business. Unless . . . " He looked at me, "you might be interested in some fine things which I have, by chance, with me."

"How much?" I asked.

THE END

WITNESS FOR THE DEFENSE

THE most striking figures in most celebrated court cases are the criminal, himself, and the prosecuting attorney. Few defense lawyers have made their role famous. Outstanding among these is Clarence Darrow an American lawyer, who was born in 1857 and died in 1938. Here was a man who devoted his life to defending the underdog against legal oppression. Many times his fee was paid simply hy the gratitude of those he had saved. That he was successful, is evidenced by the fact that none of his clients ever went to the electric chair or the scaffold.

The story of Darrow's life reads like a fascinating adventure story. Often, when a case seemed almost lost, Darrow would save the day with a lightning stroke. He believed that most crime resulted from the frustrations of poverty. Once he openly declared that "if every man, woman and child in the world had a chance to make a decent, fair, honest living there would be no jails and no lawyers and no courts."

Darrow's sense of humor was proverbial. He especially delighted in outwitting medical men. Once, he was confronted with a prosecution witness, a doctor, who was known for withholding certain pertinent information during direct examination. Then, if on cross-examination the defense attorney sought to draw out anything favorable to the defendant, the sly doctor would make a startling revelation of the facts which he had not disclosed, thus upsetting the plan of defense. It was evident to Darrow that the doctor was waiting to pull another ace from his sleeve. Darrow was determined that this time the doctor should not encounter an easy victim. When Darrow rose for final examination, he asked pleasantly:

"Did you enjoy your trip from Los Angeles, Doctor?"

"Yes, I did."

"Are you being paid for testifying in this case?"

"Yes, I am."

Mr. Darrow turned to the bench with a twinkle in his eye, and announced solemnly, "No further questions."

—John Crail

MURDER STRIKES THE VZRALS

BY JEFFERY STEVENS

ONE of the most notorious murderers this country has known was Billik, a man who claimed to be able to read people's fortunes in cards, to be something of a hypnotist and possess mysterious occult powers inherited from his witch-mother. During his black career he did away with six persons, all members of the same family.

These crimes occurred soon after the turn of the twentieth century. Billik, whose real name was Vajlcek, came to Chicago in the autumn of 1904 and established himself in the city. With him were the innocent bystanders, his wife and two children. The sign, "The Great Billik, Card Reader and Seer," was posted for the benefit of passersby.

His closest neighbors were the family of Martin Vzral. Vzral was a milk dealer and was making a comfortable enough living to care for the needs of his seven children. Billik's arrival in the block caused much talk. But the wily fellow took his time about introducing himself. This was all a part of his plan.

Finally one day he chose to buy some milk from the already-curious Martin Vzral. Once there he hinted that a great tragedy was banging over the life of the unwary milk dealer. Billik let the milk dealer worry a few days. Then he called upon the Vzral family, told Martin that his enemy was another milkman across the street, and that he would now call upon all his supernatural powers to use them to protect his new-found friend. Billik brewed a potion on the kitchen stove and then ceremoniously threw the mixture upon the stoop of the rival's home. Vzral continued to prosper in his business and thought much of it was due to the aid he had received from Billik. Thus the fortune teller won his way into the confidence of the milk dealer and his family.

Within a few weeks, Billik's domination of the family was complete. They listened fascinated to his recital of the supernatural wonders he had performed and to his tales of his mother, the witch. They began to feel indebted to him, and lent him money on the least provocation. Soon he made a habit of asking for loans. By 1905 he had stripped Martin Vzral of his bank account and, like a leech, was absorbing most of the profits of his business. But this was not enough. The wages the children earned at their jobs soon went into his pockets also. Billik persuaded Mrs. Vzral to insure the lives of her husband and four of the children. Superstition and fear clouded the eyes of his victims.

Apparently Billik had chosen the Vzrals for his victims even before he moved into the neighborhood. And his plot was moving ahead in unmistakable order. By March of 1905 when Martin Vzral began to grumble about the sad state of affairs he was in, Billik saw to it that he was disposed of with a mysterious white powder administered by the unsuspecting Mrs. Vzral. All the life insurance fell into Billik's hands. In quick order, other deaths occurred to the ill-fated family. Mary Vzral died of "stomach trouble" on July 22, 1905. Daughter Tillie died of the same symptoms in December of the same year. In August of 1906 Rose died of the same ailment. With no more insurance in sight, Billik persuaded Mrs. Vzral to sell her home and turn the money over to him. Then he did away with her also.

This series of despicable crimes did not escape the inquiring eyes of the rest of the neighborhood. Although no one possessed proof of Billik's guilt, almost everyone who knew the family thought that they had received more than their share of misfortune, that more than natural forces must be at work. Finally the rumors spread until detectives were sent to the scene to make an inquiry.

Chemists who examined the exhumed body of the "bewitched" Mary Vzral found five grains of arsenic in her stomach. All paths of the investigation led to Billik. He was immediately arrested and in the early summer of 1907 was tried and found guilty of murder in the first degree. He was sentenced to die. The law had finally caught up with Billik, the fortune teller who dealt out so much misery to the Vzral family.

TEETH IN THE LAW

IT IS embarrassing enough for a criminal when he is trapped by the police, but when the teeth in the trap are his own that's too much!

The whole thing began when a meter reader complained to police that a meter in a New York home had been wired in such a way that the gas used was not registered.

On investigation it was discovered that the stolen gas was being used to run a 250-gallon moonshine still. A clue regarding the bootlegger's identity was an upper denture found in a bowl in the kitchen. A hidden mark on the teeth identified the dentist who had made them, and he in turn gave the police the name of their owner.

The moonshiner was telephoned and told to drop around at the station if he wished to pick up his missing teeth. When he arrived, however, he found himself charged with $3,000 worth of offenses.

For operating an illegal still the federal government's bail was $1,000; on his landlord's complaint of using his dwelling for bootlegging the state placed a $2,000 bail.

Then, to add insult to injury the U. S. district attorney retained the bootlegger's false teeth as "Exhibit A" evidence in the case. The government may have another motive for holding the denture. Perhaps they believe the man will plead guilty so he can eat a decent meal!

—L. M. Phillips

The Murdered Are Mute

By Chester S. Geier

It took the efforts of two men to perfect that formula. But when one of them sought all the credit, murder was the result. Did that prove his partner's guilt?

LIGHT seeped from under the bottom of my door. For a long moment I stood there in the narrow, dark hallway of Mrs. Slade's boarding house, staring at that betraying slit of brilliance.

Someone was in my room.

I wondered about that. Who could it be? A friend whom Mrs. Slade had admitted, to wait for me? Or—a prowler who had broken in?

I put my ear to the door and listened. At first the room beyond was very still, then I caught the faint creek of bedsprings. I can say quite honestly that thought of fear didn't enter my mind at all. I just had an overpowering desire to see who was in my room and why. I've always been more than normally inquisitive, perhaps because of my scientific training. I never let problems go unanswered.

I got out my key and very quietly fitted it into the spring lock. Then I hurled the door open and leaped into the room.

Sheriff Jim Hewes was seated on the bed. Now he got up. His deputy, Rance Deal, was seated in the armchair. He got up, too.

Sheriff Hewes said quietly, "Evening, Leland. Just got home from a walk?"

"A drive," I answered. "I went down to a factory in Allenton to see if they needed a plastics research expert. They did. I start Monday."

"Just got back, eh?" Hewes asked.

I nodded, wondering what purpose lay behind his visit and his questions.

"Didn't stop anywhere along the way, did you?"

"No," I replied. I gazed at Hewes levelly. "From Allenton I drove straight back here, to Crossing City. I made no stops along the way. See here, Sheriff, what's this all about?"

Hewes said quietly, "Old Jordan Purcell was murdered about 7:30 this evening, Leland."

"Murdered?" I burst out. I stared incredulously at Hewes. Then I pulled back the cuff of my overcoat and glanced at the dial of my wristwatch. It was a little after 9:00.

Hewes' fading blue eyes were sharp with cold watching. After a moment he spoke. "If you're quite through with your little act, Leland, you can come with me. I'm forced to place you under

His face twisted. He snatched up a lamp standard and, brandishing it like a club, sprang at me with cold murder in his eyes

arrest for old Jordan Purcell's murder."

It didn't seem real. It was like something out of a nightmare.

I leaned dazedly against the edge of the old-fashioned bureau. Shock had followed shock so quickly that I was numbed.

"You're crazy," I told Hewes. "You don't know what you're saying. Why, I was gone from Crossing City all day. I just got back. How could I have managed to murder Purcell?"

Hewes shrugged bony shoulders. "You managed somehow. I've got evidence that shows you did. Show him the stuff, Rance."

THE deputy walked over to the table. For the first time I noticed a long, newspaper-wrapped bundle on the table. Deal pulled the newpapers aside. My eyes settled upon a crowbar. Lying half on top of it was a small notebook. I was near enough to see the dried blood on the curving end of the crowbar. That and what looked like a few wisps of grey hair.

I had never seen the crowbar before. But I did recognize the notebook.

Hewes said, "That crowbar was used to jimmy open the window of Purcell's basement laboratory. It was also used to bash his head in. The notebook was his—t a k e n from his laboratory. I found them both—here in your room. You were mighty careless, Leland."

I'd been clutching the edge of the bureau. Now my fingers slid off as though it were greased. It wasn't greased, of course. My hands were just slick with sweat. I rubbed it off on the smooth fleece surface of my overcoat. I was breathing rapidly through my mouth.

Hewes went on, "You had a fight with Purcell three days ago. It had something to do with the stuff you both were working on. You quit as Purcell's laboratory assistant, or else he kicked you out." Hewes paused and pointed at the objects lying in their nests of newspaper on the table. "That notebook, there, is filled with chemical formulae. Now the way I figure it, those formulae have to do with the stuff you and Purcell were working on. It was something mighty valuable. Your fight with Purcell spoiled your chances of getting any profit out of it. Today, you decided to kill him, get the notebook, and have everything for yourself. For an alibi, you pretended to leave town, looking for a new job."

I felt an abrupt, trapped anger. "You're wrong!" I snapped at Hewes. "I'll admit I quarreled with Purcell—but I certainly didn't kill him. There was no reason for me to do so."

I explained swiftly. Eccentric old Jordan Purcell and I had been working on a new plastic which we had named "plastium." It was a tough, hard material that would stand great extremes of heat and cold. It would play a vital part in the booming postwar aviation industry, for it had all the advantages of plywood or aluminum without certain of the disadvantages of either. To say that it was valuable stuff would be putting it mildly.

Anyway, the basic idea for the product had been mine. Jordan Purcell's inventive genius had played an important part in developing it, but in the final analysis, credit for the discovery of plastium could be divided equally between us both. Purcell, however, lost sight of this fact. He came gradually to regard plastium as his own particular brain-child.

The trouble started when Purcell began taunting his rival, Professor Joseph Eaton, with news of the discovery. Purcell and Eaton had been enemies as far back as I could remember. It seems they'd originally been friends when the

girl Purcell finally married came between them. From then on, any scientific discovery made by the one was used as a goad against the other.

Purcell had been holding plastium over Eaton's head as a sort of club. I hadn't liked the childish spite behind it, and I'd told him so. Further, I'd reminded him that the discovery was as much mine as his. Purcell had added his own opinions, and the upshot of it all was that I'd quit as his assistant. I didn't have any worries where plastium was concerned, for I knew Purcell was basically honest enough to guarantee me my rightful share of the proceeds which would come from marketing it. The only really difficult thing about the whole business was Joan, Purcell's daughter. She and I had reached the engagement point in our relations, and I'd been worried what the break with her father might do.

I POINTED all this out to Hewes. "So there was no reason why I should have killed Purcell," I finished. "I was going to get what was coming to me, and this would have made me rich enough not to risk going to jail by trying to get everything."

Hewes lifted his gaunt shoulders. "Maybe so, Leland. But that doesn't explain away the crowbar and notebook which I found in your room. And speaking of the notebook, it might interest you to know that it wouldn't have done you much good anyway."

"What are you talking about?" I demanded.

"There were two pages ripped out of the notebook. Without them, I don't think the formulae would have made sense." His pale blue eyes looked into mine, Hewes reached a thumb and forefinger into a lower pocket of his threadbare vest. He produced what looked like a note, soiled and wrinkled. He unfolded it slowly, keeping the hooks that were his eyes into me all the while.

"The medical examiner found this in Purcell's mouth, Leland. Obviously, Purcell had heard you working at the window with the crowbar. He knew you must have come after the notebook. He ripped these two pages out, folded them up, and stuffed them into his mouth. You knew they were missing, Leland, because you looked for them. Both Purcell and his office down in the laboratory had been searched. But you didn't find them, since Purcell had chosen a mighty good hiding place."

I shook my head wearily. "I didn't kill old Purcell. The person that did framed it onto me."

"Maybe so, Leland. But come along with me now. We've wasted enough time, talking."

I tried to swallow, but there was sand in my throat. I ached with the bitter knowledge that I'd been very neatly and thoroughly framed. Somehow I had to prove my innocence. I knew I'd never get the chance if I surrendered tamely to Hewes. There was only one thing to do.

Rance Deal had rewrapped the crowbar and the notebook in the newspapers. Now he stood slightly behind Hewes, and both were near the bed. I acted quickly. I pushed Hewes against Deal, and they bounced together in a tangle onto the bed. Then I whirled, switched off the light, and raced down the hall, slamming the door shut behind me. In the darkness, it would take them some seconds to release the lock and follow after me.

Hewes' car was near mine at the curb. The street was dark and deserted. The snow had started falling again, and a cold wind rasped against my face.

I jerked open the hood of Hewes' car, grabbed the ignition wires, and yanked. Then I leaped into my own

coupe, slammed it into motion. I was near the end of the block when the shots roared after me. I turned down Center, then up Grand.

After three blocks or so, I saw a man hurrying along the sidewalk, his head bent against the wind. I recognized him from the overcoat he wore. It was Howard Talley. Both Talley and I had rooms at Mrs. Slade's, and we were pretty g o o d friends. We'd kicked around a lot together before I'd started going steady with Joan. Talley had been doing postgraduate work at the university, and when I'd quit Jordan Purcell, Talley had taken my place as the old man's assistant.

I NEEDED someone with whom to talk over my troubles, and Howard Talley was just the right person. I drew up beside him, called out his name. He stopped, peering at me through the darkness. Then he came over to the car. I motioned for him to get in. He did so without asking questions, and I got under way again.

"Say, what's eating you, Dave?" Talley asked after a moment. He frowned at me wonderingly.

"I'm in trouble," I answered. "Bad trouble. I'll explain shortly."

I continued up Grand until we reached Pike Road, then I turned down this, heading for open country. I parked finally in a narrow, rutted side-road, where snow-covered shrubbery enclosed us like ghosts. I told Talley everything—Hewes being in my room when I returned to town, the accusation, the planted evidence.

When I had finished, Talley shook his head. There was something mournful about the action, the way you shake your head over the death of a friend. Talley asked, "What do you make of it, Dave?"

"Make of it? I was framed, of course!" I snapped. "Whoever killed Purcell planted that crowbar and notebook in my room."

"Got any ideas about who might have done it?"

"Well, there's one good suspect—Professor Joseph Eaton. He and Purcell hated each other's guts. And Eaton knew about plastium, as Purcell had told him about it. The whole town knew about my break with Purcell. Eaton could very likely have decided to murder Purcell and steal the plastium formulae, using me as the goat."

Talley was suddenly excited. "Dave—I've remembered something. I saw Joan a while ago, and she told me Eaton had been at the house this evening!"

"What time?" I asked quickly.

"About 8:00. Eaton wanted to see Purcell. I wasn't there at the time, having returned to Mrs. Slade's place at 6:30. Joan went down to the laboratory to tell Purcell, and that's when she discovered that he had been murdered. The news was all over town by 8:30, and that's the time I got to the house. Eaton was gone by then. Sheriff Hewes had dismissed him."

"Eight o'clock. . . ." I mused. Eight o'clock—it checks! Look, Howard, Hewes told me Purcell had been killed about 7:30. Suppose Eaton had got to the house around that time, jimmied his way into the laboratory. He could talk to Purcell, demand the formulae, kill him, then search for the pages that were missing from the notebook. I'd say that would take about a half hour. Then Eaton could have left the lab through the window, gone around the side of the house, and asked to see Purcell—thus establishing a neat little alibi for himself!"

Talley nodded with thoughtful slowness. "It could have happened that way Dave. But what about the crow-

bar and notebook in your room?"

"Simple. Hewes dismissed Eaton around 8:30. Eaton had the crowbar and notebook hidden somewhere. He took them to Mrs. Slade's boarding house, after having no doubt copied the contents of the notebook. A wooden porch runs along two sides of the Slade house. Eaton could have climbed a post to reach the window of my room. It would have been an easy matter to force the window open. All Eaton had to do was plant the stuff in my room, slide back down the post, and drive home."

Everything seemed to fit nicely enough. But there were certain little inconsistencies about my theory which bothered me.

Talley said, "Dave, what makes you think Eaton might have copied the contents of Purcell's notebook?"

"It was a logical thing to do. Those formulae dealt with a valuable discovery. Eaton might have thought he could gain a clue to the complete plastium formula from what was left in the notebook. Or he might have intended to wait until everything had quieted down and get the rest of the formula from Joan. Hewes would probably return the missing pages to her after the case was closed."

TALLEY was staring into the darkness beyond the windshield, fingering his jaw abstractedly. Abruptly I remembered something. Hewes had told me that the pages torn from the notebook had been folded—and hidden in Purcell's mouth. Why had Purcell chosen this as a hiding place when it was obvious that he wouldn't have been able to talk and only with difficulty shout for help? His murderer would surely have noticed this, and deduced that the missing notebook pages were hidden in Purcell's mouth.

It just didn't make sense. I thought about it—and suddenly it did.

I clutched Talley's arm excitedly. "Howard, I want to know something. It's important. Did old Purcell have one of his usual attacks of laryngitis today?"

Talley grinned. "Yeah. He didn't say a darn word to me all morning, and I thought he was just in one of his pleasanter moods. You know how I mean. I mentioned it to Joan at lunch, and she told me he'd caught a cold and that he had an attack of laryngitis every time he did."

"We're going to see Eaton, then," I said grimly. "There's something I've got to find out."

I started the car and got back onto Pike Road. I wasn't worried about Hewes. What I'd done to his car would keep him out of circulation for awhile. About all he could do was to issue a notice to the State highway police to be on the lookout for me. My flight from the boarding house had no doubt convinced him of my apparent guilt, and he wouldn't expect me to be anywhere near Crossing City.

It was a short drive to Eaton's house. I reached it without encountering the minions of the law in any form.

Talley advised, "Better wait here, Dave. I'll go in and see if he's home. Eaton wouldn't be likely to put out the welcome mat for the man he framed for murder."

I nodded unhesitatingly. Talley was right. He climbed out of the car and walked to the door. I watched and waited with a hard tightness inside me.

Talley rang the doorbell. After a moment the door opened. Eaton's housekeeper stood framed in the light from the hall. Talley spoke to her, and she stood aside to allow him entrance. The seconds ticked away, and the hard tightness inside me got harder and

tighter. Then Talley reappeared, motioning to me.

"I don't like this," he whispered when I joined him at the door. "I told Eaton that a friend and I wanted to talk to him. He acted funny."

Talley pulled me into the hall. The housekeeper stood in the entrance to the living room, watching me with wide grey eyes. Her hands were twisting nervously in the folds of a checkered apron.

"Eaton's in the library," Talley said.

BUT when we entered the library, there was no one in it. Talley gave me a long, knowing look. Then he jerked his head toward the door, and I followed him somewhat bewilderedly out of the house.

"Eaton must be the man, all right," Talley decided. "He seemed strange when I said we wanted to see him. When I went to get you, he must have watched through a window. Recognizing you, he ran out of the house."

"Then he must be around here somewhere," I pointed out. "He didn't have time to get far."

"We'll look for him. Dave, you take the left side of the house, and I'll take the right."

I nodded quick agreement, patted Talley's shoulder, then hurried to fill my part of the strategy. I reached the left side of the house and started around it. From somewhere ahead, feet crunched in the snow.

"Professor Eaton!" I called out. "Stop. I want to talk to you."

My answer was a stab of flame and a roar of sound. I threw myself against the side of the house, hugging my body against the cold, rough bricks. Eaton had shot at me! There seemed little doubt but that he was actually the murderer of old Jordan Purcell. Only a man with a guilty conscience would act like that.

Talley's voice reached me anxiously. "Dave! Dave—are you all right?"

I didn't answer immediately. I strained the darkness with eyes and ears. I heard the footsteps again. They were making fast running sounds, fading with distance.

I joined Talley in front of the house. "Eaton shot at me and ran away. It looks bad for him, Howard."

Talley looked shaken. "It's too dangerous to go after him, Dave. Eaton's got a gun—and we just can't throw snowballs." Talley gripped my arm. "We know Eaton's the murderer. Let's go to see Sheriff Hewes."

I shook my head slowly. "We haven't the slightest bit of real evidence against Eaton. Sheriff Hewes would just slap me in jail."

"Then what are we going to do?" Talley looked at me helplessly.

"There's something I want to find out," I told him. "If I can't question Eaton, there's only one other way I can learn what I want to know. Come on, Howard, we're going to see Joan."

WHEN Joan opened the door in response to my ring, her first reaction to sight of me was surprise—the unpleasant kind. For a moment I thought she was going to slam the door in my face. But she obviously decided to give me a chance to say something, maybe to see if I could blacken myself any more in her estimation than I was already. Her pretty face had an icy, cold expression that made the winter night seem like spring.

"You!" she said. Somehow she made that one word cover everything censored and unprintable. "What are you doing here?"

"I've got to talk to you," I answered. "I'm trying to clear myself, and there's something I have to know."

Joan's hazel eyes probed my face. "Are you trying to tell me you didn't murder my father?"

"I didn't murder him, Joan," I said quietly. "I wouldn't be here, if I had."

Indecision twisted her features like a pain. "But, Dave, all that evidence in your room—"

"I was framed!" I told her vehemently. "The real murderer of your father planted that stuff in my room so it would look as though I'd done it." I grasped her shoulders. "Joan, girl, snap out of it! You can't go on thinking about me this way. Do you think I'd come here and look you in the eyes and lie to you if I did what they say I did? Do you think I'm as rotten clear through as that?"

The misery left her face, and she was again the Joan I'd always known. She came to me, and I held her close. It more than made up for what I'd gone through that night.

Behind me, at the bottom of the steps, Talley coughed. It brought me back down to earth. I explained Talley's presence to Joan, and we went into the house.

Talley was grinning. "You two better go in the living room. I'll wait here, in the hall."

Joan and I took his advice in some embarassment. When we were alone, she asked, "Dave, why did you come here? It's dangerous. Sheriff Hewes is convinced of your guilt. He's out looking for you."

"There's something I want to know. It may clear me. Look—did Professor Eaton see your father before he came over this evening? Did they get in touch in any way?"

"Why, no, Dave. Father had laryngitis again. You know he always gets it when he has a cold."

"Your father didn't go out? He was home all day?"

Joan nodded. She looked bewildered.

I said, "Are you sure he didn't make a phone call to Eaton?"

"I'm certain, Dave. Father was always self-conscious about his laryngitis. He surely wouldn't have wanted Professor Eaton to know, and he wouldn't have made arrangements to see Eaton while he had it."

"The clincher!" I whispered exultantly. I grabbed Joan and held her hard. It was quite a while before I released her. I wasn't in any hurry for the distasteful job that lay ahead.

Joan and I returned to the hall. Talley was seated in the chair beside the telephone stand. Now he stood up.

I took a deep breath. "Well, it's finished, Howard. I know who the murderer is."

He grinned. "Swell, Dave! Who is it?"

"You, Howard."

Talley's face went blank. "Are you kidding me?"

"I'm afraid not, Howard. You murdered old Jordan Purcell."

Talley looked at Joan appealingly. "What's wrong with Dave? He's gone nuts!"

MY WORDS were a wedge between them. "Howard, Jordan Purcell had an attack of laryngitis today. You and Joan knew. I didn't until you told me about it. Eaton didn't know, and there was no way he could have found out.

"The murderer of Jordan Purcell *knew* he had laryngitis. That's why he risked jimmying the basement window while Jordan Purcell was present in the room, because he knew Purcell wouldn't be able to shout a warning. And that's why he didn't find those missing notebook pages hidden in Purcell's mouth. To anyone who didn't know Purcell was temporarily mute, his silence would

have seemed queer. When he found the pages torn out of the notebook and searched for them without success, he'd have remembered Purcell's strange silence. There could have been only one reason—and that because Purcell had hidden the missing pages in his mouth. Thus those missing pages would have been found.

"But the murderer didn't find them. To him, Purcell's silence was perfectly obvious. Moreover, the fact that the murderer knew the pages were missing and search for them at all, showed that he had been acquainted with the contents of the notebook. Eaton wasn't. That leaves you, Howard. You worked for Purcell long enough to know what the notebook contained."

Talley laughed softly. "Really, Dave, as a detective you're a scream."

"Think so, Howard? I'm not finished yet. In order to plant the crowbar and notebook on me, the murderer had to know the location of my room at Mrs. Slade's boarding house. Eaton couldn't have known. He lived clear on the other side of town, and in addition he and I were only nodding acquaintances. But you knew because you lived at Mrs. Slade's. You knew also that I had left Crossing City on a job hunt and wouldn't get back until late. Further, there's the matter of the crowbar. The murderer couldn't have bought one from a hardware store, since this would have identified him with the crime. Mr. Slade has a tool shed at the rear of the boarding house. No doubt it was from there that you got the crowbar."

Talley laughed again, but the softness had gone. His eyes were fixed in an unblinking stare of tight, tense watching.

I went on, "This is the way it must have happened. You left Jordan Purcell at 6:30. You went to Mrs. Slade's and had supper. Then you got that crowbar out of the toolshed. You knew Purcell would quite likely be in the lab, but it wasn't just robbery that you intended. It was out and out murder. You wanted the plastium formulae, and to get it you had to remove Purcell and myself from the picture. This you intended to do by murdering Purcell and framing me. Purcell didn't discuss his work with Joan, and with both of us out of the way, you could market plastium, and there was no way Joan could prove she had any right to it. You could claim you had developed the idea independently.

"You returned here about 7:30, and jimmied open the basement laboratory window. Purcell heard you. There wasn't time to run away. He wasn't able to shout. He tore out those two pages, folded them, and stuffed them into his mouth. You couldn't see what was happening. The office was hidden from where you entered. When you reached Purcell, you hit him over the head with the crowbar, killing him. You searched for the missing notebook pages, but you didn't find them.

"You left by the way you entered. You copied the contents of the notebook, hoping later to obtain the missing pages. Hewes would return them to Joan after it was over, and you could always have got them from her by some trick. Then you returned to Mrs. Slade's, climbed the porch to my room, and left the crowbar and notebook where Hewes would find them later.

"One thing more—when I told you of my suspicions concerning Professor Eaton, you decided to play up, hoping that way to trick me. When you entered Eaton's house, you warned him that I had come to kill him. Eaton was under the impression that I had killed Purcell, as was most everyone, and he didn't think this entirely illogical. Eaton

ran—not because he was guilty, but because he was afraid."

Talley shook his head slowly. His eyes never left my face. "You're crazy, Dave. You're just trying to shove this onto me."

"All right, Howard, if you're innocent as you claim, you should be willing to submit to a search. I don't think you had time to hide the formulae you copied from Purcell's notebook. You should still—" I paused. The growl of approaching cars reached my ears.

"The Sheriff," Talley said with feral triumph. "I called him while you and Joan were in the living room. Better give up quietly, Dave."

"Not yet," I said. I walked forward slowly. "I'm going to search you, Howard. I'm going to see if you have that copy—"

His face twisted. He reached out with sudden violence, snatched a brass and marble lamp from the telephone stand. Brandishing it like a club, he came at me. Joan screamed.

I threw myself at Talley's legs, and we went down in a writhing tangle. He tried furiously to swing the lamp at my head. I caught his arm, wrenched it savagely. He grunted, released the lamp. He tried to get his hands on my throat, but I tore them away. Then I rolled aside, got to my feet. As Talley followed scramblingly, I hit him. The blow took him squarely on the chin. It numbed my arm to the shoulder. He sprawled back to the floor and didn't move again.

I searched feverishly through his pockets. And I found them. Several pages of formulae in Talley's neat script—obviously copied from old Jordan Purcell's notebook.

Joan ran to me, and I held her tightly. That was how Sheriff Hewes found us when he burst in a moment later.

THE END

GUILLOTINE

TO HONEST men as well as criminals the words electric chair and gas chamber bring a disturbing chill. But they have not nearly the sickening effect on our senses as the word *guillotine.*

Here is an instrument of justice that originated in Persia, so long ago that the date of its first use is not known. In thirteenth century Italy a similar device, known as the *mannaia* was used for decapitations. It was used in Scotland, there called the *maiden.* And today, in modern France, the guillotine is still used as capital punishment.

It was during the French Revolution in 1792 that Dr. Joseph Guillotin suggested the device for beheading people. Hundreds of persons, many innocent, were in those bloody days of civil strife decapitated by the dread instrument.

Imagine yourself for a moment as a spectator at a guillotine execution. It is before dawn on a cold, drizzling October morning. Two closed vans arrive at the site, and several men unload the oddly shaped sections of the instrument. Skillfully they erect it: two upright posts casting gloomy shadows in that early-morning light, the crosspiece, under which hangs the broad, steel blade, triangularly shaped and weighted with mercury. A leather sheath protects its sharp edge from blunting and from the inclement weather. Below the knife is the *lunette,* a piece of wood, having a hole in the center and divided in the middle. Then under the lunette is the *bascule,* the board against which the criminal must be strapped while in an upright position, which then falls and brings his head beneath the knife.

Gradually, during these preparations you have been joined by other curious spectators until a mass of people surround the platform. The sounds of the workmen stop, and the murmuring of the crowd is silent for a moment as the executioner is seen arriving. Slowly and deliberately he examines the guillotine. Every part of the machine is tested. A dummy is brought and strapped to the bascule. It falls, the top half of the lunette slides down, the knife drops and the stuffed wool head is severed. This process is repeated twice more, then all is in readiness for the execution.

Everyone turns at the arrival of a group of gendarmes, in whose midst is the criminal. His shirt has been cut away from the neck and his hands are tied behind his back. As he reaches the platform a cry is heard in the crowd, and in another section a hysterical laugh. As an early arrival you have gained a front row position, and from the base of the guillotine you can see the beads of sweat and fear on the criminal's face, as he proceeds up the three steps leading to the instrument of death. There he is seized, a few swift motions follow, there is one last agonizing cry, and then the hiss of the falling blade.

Suddenly the air seems cleared, the momentary hush of the crowd is replaced by an audible sigh of relief.

—*A. Morris.*

THE BLACKKEY

BY M. SCOTT MICHEL

(Continued from page 69)

me, Voice." Richard's voice had grown louder and people at other tables were looking over.

"You're getting nasty, Richard. Stop it."

Richard leaned over the table and his hand shot out and grabbed Cornell's jacket lapels. "And I c'n get a whole lot nastier, Mr. Voice. A whole lot. And I'm warning you . . ."

"Take your hand off me, Richard," Cornell said quietly.

". . . one fine night I'm goin' t' break y' neck!"

"Take your hand off," Cornell said, feeling the anger mount within him.

Richard released his jacket and fell back in his seat. "Be good 'nuff to leave me in my solitude," he said, waving him away.

Cornell got up and walked out of the restaurant.

OUTSIDE, he managed to secure a taxi only by the high pressure method of jumping into one pulling over to the curb before the occupants were half out. The rain was coming down in a steady pour as though a dam had burst.

He let himself into his apartment. There were no lights on and it was very quiet. He tip-toed to the bedroom, peered in as was his usual custom. A flash of lightning showed him the bed was empty.

"Serena!" he called, alarmed, his heart pounding against his chest. The rubber band tightness around his head was back again.

No answer.

"Serena. Where are you?"

A clap of thunder drowned out his last words, shook the building. He ran back to the waiting room and switched on the lights. The room was empty. He rushed into the consultation room, and with the next flash of lightning saw her standing near the window. A white, fragile, object of beauty. Like an oil painting hanging majestically under special lighting. Like a Dresden china doll.

Still shaking from the effects of his fright, he snapped at her: "What are you doing there? Why didn't you answer me?"

She walked over to him and stood in front of him in the darkness of the room. He couldn't see her eyes and he was glad of that. He didn't want to see the coldness in them.

"Were you frightened?" she said in her tinkling voice. It sent a chill through him. "Were you fearful I might not be here again." Her voice trembled, bubbled.

"Now what are you up to?" He walked away from her, to the wall, and pressed the light switch.

She followed him over, and when he turned around he walked into her, then backed away.

"Tell me, were you *really* frightened, Alex?"

"Go to bed." He felt weak and agitated.

"I mean fright that creeps up from your stomach, twisting on its way up to your throat? Do you know the meaning of real fear? Have you ever felt it tug at your heart, a faint tickle, then work into excruciating pain? An uncontrollable terror that takes possession of your mind, breaks down your reasoning—till the thought of death

produces death?"

He didn't answer her, now. He could see her eyes, cold gray that didn't waver or twinkle or show weakness, and he was puzzled and fearful of them.

"You're cruel, Alex. With all your kindness you're cruel."

"Please go to bed."

"Were you frightened not to find me here?"

"Yes. What are you hoping to accomplish with all this?"

"That you were frightened because you love me and wanted me here just to have me here." She looked at him, searchingly.

"I don't love you, Serena . . . Not the way you want it. I'm attached to you, as a patient, as. . . ."

Her head was tilted back, her hair falling loosely about her shoulders. The eyes, round and wide, the tints of silver in them now glinting like a distant neon sign, flashing on and off . . . The smoothness of her cheeks and neck.

"As what . . ." she sighed, her lips parted.

He shook his head, walked around her, went into the bathroom and filled the tub. He asked himself—was she right? Was he in love with her?

CHAPTER XV

CORNELL slept, the remainder of that night, like a hapless fish, pulled out of water, plunged back, then yanked out again. The fury of the storm had spent itself and was in its waning phase. The thunder rolled, but from some where out on the Atlantic Ocean; the lightning flashes were a pale blue-purple color. A refreshing breeze was giving Manhattan its first comfortable night in seventeen days.

As soon as he started to doze, his mind conjured a picture of a bouquet of flowers being put into a small coffin. He had the feeling he was falling into space and he awoke with a fright.

Coffin. Coffin. It ran through his mind with alarming speed. He couldn't get it, but the answer was there. The bouquet of flowers turned into a small child. Why a child? Why a coffin?

Coffin was the clue. . . .

He started to doze again. The cool breeze coming in the window floated over his bare chest, curled under his chin, and he fell asleep. . . . For three quarters of an hour.

It was at four o'clock AM when he awoke from his sleep, sat up stiffly, and opened his eyes wide, and there was a look of exhilaration on his boyish face.

He said aloud, to himself: "The coffin is a womb."

He got up, slipped into a silk robe and walked to the bedroom and knocked softly on the door. There was no reply from Serena. He turned on the light in the hallway and opened the door the bedroom. The light seeping in was ample to illuminate the room faintly.

He stood over the sleeping figure of Serena Chalmers, regarding her with tenderness. The blonde hair was strewn over the pillow, haphazardly. Only her oval face showed, the covers drawn under her neck. She looked small and childish, her arms out, swamped by the size of his pajamas.

He was about to shake her, when the idea occurred to him. He dropped to his knees, put his mouth six inches from her ear, and spoke in a very soft, firm voice:

"Serena Chalmers, listen to me. Do not wake up. I do not want you to awaken. I want you to hear every word I say and not wake up. You must do as I say because I am your friend. I am going to help you. I am going to tell you the meaning of a part of your dream and I want you to tell me whether I am right or wrong. You

will remember everything I say and everything you answer when you awake in the morning."

Serena slept on, quietly, her face calm and not changing expression. Thunder rumbled, then a pale flash of lightning that colored her face purple, as though ultra-violet light was turned on. Then darkness and quiet. A deep quiet that made even Cornell feel a creeping sensation along the back of his neck.

He kept trying to push through to her subconscious mind.

"Remember, Serena Chalmers, you must answer my questions without waking up. You can't wake up. *I defy you to wake up.*"

She didn't move.

"This is the part of your dream I want to analyze. Listen to it and remember it. You dreamt you were holding a bouquet of flowers. You blew on them and they wilted. You put them in a small coffin and a man wearing thick glasses took them out of the coffin and the flowers turned into a small child. Then you saw a long line of women, all carrying small coffins and the man with the thick glasses took a bouquet of flowers out of each coffin. Then when the woman who was bleeding brought her coffin up to him he became angry and tells her to stop bleeding."

Cornell stopped and watched her face. She sighed once but didn't open her eyes. The breeze stirred the venetian blinds, made the slats rattle, filling the silent room like machine-gun fire.

"The key word, Serena," he went on quickly, "is *coffin*. Does the coffin symbolize the female womb? Answer me, Serena."

She said nothing, simply turned her head to rest on the right cheek, away from him.

"Answer me, Serena. Does the coffin symbolize the womb? *Answer me.*"

Slowly, her lips parted, and weakly she said, "Y-yes."

FILLED with a sense of accomplishment, Cornell went on: "The bouquet of flowers is Edna-Anne Knight. The man with the thick glasses is Dr. Burton Edison. The coffin is a womb. Interpreted, your dream reveals the following: You are jealous of Edna-Anne Knight because, while you deny it, even denied it prior to your attack of amnesia, the object of your love is Richard Briggs. You put Edna-Anne out of competition by having her wilt. And when flowers wilt, they die."

She stirred faintly. Lines formed across her forehead as her eyes became tight—but she remained asleep.

"You put the bouquet of flowers, who is Edna-Anne, into a small coffin, which is the womb. Dr. Edison takes the flowers out of the coffin, but it is a small child. Is this what you mean to say, Serena: *Dr. Edison performed an abortion on Edna-Anne Knight?*"

The wrinkles left her brow and the skin tightened, the hairline drawn back. For a moment her eyelids fluttered, but didn't open and her head rolled slowly from side to side.

"Y-yes," came the weak reply from her lips, and Cornell could see the tension that she must be suffering.

"Are you also saying that many women came to Dr. Edison for abortions, that he runs an abortion mill? In your dream, he takes a bouquet of flowers out of each coffin, but this is after the bouquet of flowers representing Edna-Anne Knight turns into a small child. The flowers now represent an unborn foetus. Answer me, Serena. Is this interpretation correct?"

Groaning, now, Serena's head continued to roll from side to side, picking up slight momentum. The eyelids opened for a second, stared dully, then

closed. She tried again, with an effort that stiffened her body, to get her eyes open, then failed and her head stopped rolling.

"Listen, Serena. Then when the woman who was bleeding—the woman we know to be Marion Hillman, the murdered nurse—came up to Dr. Edison, he became enraged and told her to stop bleeding. Did Dr. Edison perform an abortion on Marion Hillman? Did it fail? Or did Marion Hillman know about Dr. Edison's abortion ring and so he killed her?"

She neither spoke nor moved her eyes.

Cornell hammered at her: "Tell me, Serena, whom did you see murder Marion Hillman? What is the black key? The black key, Serena. *The Black Key!* What is it? Who murdered Marion Hillman? Tell me!"

Now, Serena showed her inner struggle to get her eyes open. They parted, fell back, parted again. Suddenly, she bolted upright, almost knocking Cornell backwards.

She screamed. Once, twice—screams filled with terror, her hands clenched into fists, her eyes wide and maniacal looking.

CORNELL pounced on her, clamped his hand over her mouth. She bit his hand and he withdrew it. She screamed again, squirming from his grasp, heaving her body frantically, like a writhing snake.

He grabbed for the pillow, pushed it against her face, forced her down, and held the pillow over her head for many, many minutes. He was perspiring freely and his heart was pumping madly against his chest. He could think of nothing, except that the screams had been heard and that the police would be barging in any minute.

She stopped squirming and he couldn't hear any sounds coming from under the pillow. He removed the pillow and looked at her. Her eyes were opened, looking at him, an expression of hurt on her face that wrung his heart. Her mussed hair, the whiteness of her face, the gray eyes, all added to her beauty.

"Wha . . . w-what are you doing to me?" she whispered.

"You had a nightmare and started to scream." His own voice was choked now.

"I . . . heard your voice," she said, still whispering, her eyes never leaving his face. "You were t-talking to me. You were sitting at your desk and I was on the couch. You were t-telling me all about a girl named Edna-Anne Knight who had an abortion by Dr. Edison and of many women coming to Dr. Edison for abortions. You asked me to tell you what the black key was and I was going to . . ."

Cornell waited, not showing his anxiety.

"I . . . I was g-going to, when I saw him behind you."

"Who?"

"The ugly man. He shook the black key at me. He had a rope and he was going to wind it around your neck. Then I screamed."

"And you still don't know who the ugly man is? Or what the Black Key is?"

She shook her head, slowly.

Cornell sighed, and the cool breeze coming in through the window, chilled his perspiring body.

"Go back to sleep, Serena, please."

He tried to sleep again, then another thought occurred to him. The association Serena had had for the girl with the long red hair had been "procurer." He had broken that down into one who was in favor of cures. But suppose the word stood in its original meaning. Sup-

pose Pauline Setton, M.D. *was* a procurer for Dr. Edison, feeding patients into his abortion mill?

He sighed. He was hemmed in from many sides. From the law, from the murderer, who was conceivably the one who had hidden behind the door and hit him on the head—from his own conscience and from the District Attorney's office, which involved his career.

Attack and damn you, he thought to himself. I've got Serena Chalmers, I've got her dream-clues, and I now have a good many facts to work with. Go ahead, do your dirtiest.

CHAPTER XVI

PAULINE SETTON stretched her body in front of the open window and breathed in deeply, filling her lungs with the cool, invigorating breeze of this splendid summer morning. The sun streamed in, bathing her face and hair. From the garden came the smell of freshly cut grass, the sound of the gardener's lawn mower, the cheery twirpings of the birds parked on the tree outside her window.

She showered, dressed, and sat down to brush her hair.

A glorious day.

No Roff.

What a terrible contrast. The implication struck her, causing a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach. No Roff. Had she been too hasty? she tormented herself. What *was* the matter with her, anyway, that she couldn't overcome that hatred of accepting help. But it wasn't only that trait in her character. It was also her very deep love for Roff, her deep desire to keep his name free of all the unniceties connected with her name. But she wanted him! Indeed.

"What a conflicting mess you are," she said to her image in the mirror. The image seemed to smile back at her, ironically.

Shame. That was the basic reason, she discovered, for wanting Roff's name not involved. That was what she feared, having Roff ashamed of her. Roff was her first love, puppy love, yet coming at a mature age. Suppose Roff found out about that . . . that "mistake" in London?

The thought of it made her shudder and she finished brushing her hair. She didn't braid it this time, but left it loose and flowing. She knew she would never braid it again, and with this thought came to her the revelation of how terribly *un*important her career as a doctor seemed to her now.

She left her room and went downstairs. She almost stopped at Dudley's room, from force of habit, and she tried to shake off the weird feeling that was gripping her. The door to Serena's room made her mind jump to the disappearance of her f r i e n d. What tragedy lurked behind *that* secret?

Richard wasn't at the dining room table, and she was glad. Those free and easy, parasitic traits of her cousin, which she had always regarded with amusement, now irritated her.

Rosamond heard her, poked her face out of the door leading to the kitchen, retreated and came back bearing hot cereal and wheat cakes.

"Where's Richard, Rosamond?" Pauline said.

"He's gone fo' a wa'k," said Rosamond. "But Doctah Ed'son is waitin' fo' yuh."

"Here? Good Lord, why didn't you tell me?"

"Go up dem s t e p s to tell yuh? Hummmph." Rosamond shook her head. "Jus' yo' worry 'bout not losin' weight, Miss Pauline. Yo' don' eat hardly nuff fo' a chile."

"Please ask Dr. Edison to join me,"

Pauline said, shaking her head, annoyed. The red hair bounced over her shoulders and she straightened it with her hands.

DR. BURTON EDISON strode in, a serious look on his face. His hair was slicked down flat from the morning combing and the flatness accentuated the longness of his nose.

"Burt, I'm sorry you waited. Rosamond didn't tell me you were here till now."

"Good morning, Pauline. It's quite all right."

"Sit down, Burt. Will you have breakfast?"

"Coffee, thank you." He sat down opposite her. "My fault for such an early visit. Where's Richard?"

"Out for a walk," she said, pouring him a cup of coffee. She watched the reflection of the light in the thick glasses, the distorted brown eyes behind them. He caused her to feel uneasy, his fingers moving nervously, the rapidity of his speech.

"Just as well. I want to talk to you alone."

"What about?" she turned her eyes away from him. Somehow, she couldn't forget the hatred he bore for Dudley and Marion after Dudley had talked Marion out of marrying him.

"I'm worried about you." He stirred the sugar in his coffee, then tasted it. He said again, "Really worried."

"Indeed?"

"There's the look on your face. That same look." Edison frowned at her. "You always did resent anybody helping you. Always. Can't you understand it's no shame to be helped?"

"Get to the point, Burt." She wished he would go away and mind his own business. The help she needed he couldn't give her.

"Well, the police know you were the only one with a key to my office. The only one. I had to tell them that."

"Indeed." Her look was faintly sarcastic. She poured syrup over her wheat cakes and cut them in small sections.

"You must tell me the *truth,* Pauline."

"About what?"

"Where is Serena?"

The fork dropped from her hand, clanked against the dish. He looked up at her, startled.

"Are you serious, Burt?" Pauline gaped at him. "Do you think *I* know where Serena is?"

"Damn it, Pauline, a girl doesn't disappear into thin air overnight and defy all police efforts to track her down. Serena is some place. Nearby, too, I'll bet. Maybe dead."

"Murdered . . .?"

"It's a serious possibility. Yes."

"And you . . . you think *I* know where her body is?"

"You were close friends." Edison's homely face seemed surprised at his own frankness. "I don't believe Serena would disappear without having some contact with you."

Pauline put her napkin aside, pushed back in her chair, and stood up. "Burt, please leave now."

"Oh, come, Pauline. I . . ."

"Will you please leave?"

Edison stood up. "I'm sorry you're acting this way, Pauline. I'm concerned about Serena because I liked her. I'm fond of you and thought I might be of some help to you. Good morning."

He whirled around angrily and strode from the room rapidly, his long legs seeming like stilts.

ALEXANDER CORNELL, attired in a blue gabardine suit, and hatless, rang the bell of the Briggs home on Fifth Avenue and listened to the

sound of the chimes striking inside.

The door was opened immediately, and he was not at all startled to see the tall, lanky figure of Dr. Edison standing there.

"Well, good morning," said Cornell lightly, to the scowling Dr. Edison. He looked past Edison, saw Pauline standing midway in the huge, marble-floored foyer, then he looked up at Edison.

"I phoned your office, Dr. Edison," he said, "and was told I could possibly find you here."

The scowl on Edison's face deepened. "I've told Miss Judson never to give out my whereabouts. E x c e p t for emergency calls."

"She told me that. I persuaded her that this was an emergency."

Pauline had come closer and Cornell greeted her. She nodded back at him, not speaking. Surprised, he could see the rouge and lip-stick she had used, the red hair combed out full, the low-necked dress she wore.

"I am," said Edison, "now on my way out—by request."

"Indeed," Pauline now spoke.

"All I did was offer my assistance," said Edison.

Cornell was amused the way they both spoke to him, not to each other. It was Pauline's turn:

"Indeed," she said again. "Meantime, insinuating that I had Serena, dead or alive, hidden away, and that since I had a key to his office I poisoned Uncle Dudley."

Cornell winced internally. The inference of somebody hiding Serena struck a sensitive spot.

"Perhaps," he said, "Dr. Edison has information to back up his accusations," Cornell prompted. Let them argue, he thought. Loss of temper produces many bits of hidden information.

"If I did," Edison glared at him, "I wouldn't tell *you,* certainly. Now if you'll both excuse me . . ." He shoved past Cornell.

"Wait a second, I'll go along with you," said Cornell. "Pauline, only a fool doesn't k n o w when enough's enough. Think it over, then phone Regent—2-6606."

Outside, Edison walked on, in his long strides. Cornel skipped a few steps to keep up with him.

"Damn peculiar, that Pauline," said Edison. He took out a packet of cigarettes, flipped out a cigarette and lit it.

Cornell made no reply to this but kept walking beside the taller doctor.

Edison shot a look over at him. "What did you want to see me about?"

Cornell found himself looking at Edison, trying to study his subject. Edison noticed it and said, "What're you doing, putting me on your analytical mental couch? I don't like it. Not a bit."

Cornell said, "I wanted to see you about Edna-Anne Knight."

"What about her?"

"Was she a patient of yours?" They stopped on the corner to wait for the light to change. The streets were crowded with people and automobiles. Manhattan had sprung into activity with the break-up of the heat wave.

"Yes, she was. So what?"

"What did you treat her for?" said Cornell.

"Hell, you ought to know better than that, Cornell," said Edison. "Or don't you psychiatrists respect a patients confidence?"

"Never mind, let me tell you what you treated her for. Truth is, you did a foetus curettage."

CORNELL could detect no facial change in the silent Dr. Edison. The light changed and they crossed the street and kept on walking. The sun, reflecting in his thick glasses, hid his eyes completely. All you could see was

the lenses and a large bright spot in the center.

Cornell added, "That was why Dudley was against Edna-Anne marrying Richard. Or one of the factors, anyway."

Edison's voice was low. "The next time, get *all* the facts. All of them. Edna-Anne came to me as a *married* woman. She was pregnant and had nephritis. She couldn't have that child with her kidney condition without endangering her life. Under the law, I was legally entitled to abortion her, having the written agreement of two other qualified physicians, one a urologist specialist of high standing. The abortion was done at a hospital, the record of which you can secure."

"I see," said Cornell. (Thing is, I don't really, he thought to himself. Serena's association said yes. Edison says no.)

Edison spoke on his own volition.

"Edna-Anne is divorced from her husband, who was against the abortion. He was an ignorant fool. Crude fellow, endowed with religious zeal, who preferred to see his wife die rather than submit."

"Where is he now?"

Edison shrugged. "Alfred Knight made short work of him. Paid him off and he dropped from sight."

Cornell deliberated for a moment the wisdom of divulging the rest of the information he had learned last night—but before he could think it out carefully, he blurted:

"Thing is, Dr. Edison, my informant hinted that you might be running an abortion ring." Now that he had said it, he waited for the outburst.

Edison's neck muscles became red and Cornell could see the veins standing out. But his voice was kept under control.

"You realize *what* you're saying to a medical man?"

"Yes," said Cornell coolly.

"Who is your informant?"

"I can't tell you that."

"Oh, of course, not. But you can walk up to a fellow physician and condemn him to his face of running an abortion mill. Just like that. No evidence. No facts."

"I'm sorry to have to be so blunt, Edison. But murder is a sordid business; you can't inject niceness into it. Yesterday, some one hid in my apartment and when I came in I was hit on the head and knocked unconscious. It might have been you. I don't know. I can't afford to be diplomatic about anything."

When Edison made no reply, Cornell went on:

"Now there is a very strong motive supplied for you, other than an already strong motive of your hating Marion and Dudley for what you consider a grave injustice done unto you. Assuming you are doing many curettages, I must assume that Marion Hillman, an opportunist and close to you for awhile, had learned of it and might have been blackmailing you. I don't think you'd stop at murdering her."

"Why did I kill Dudley?" said Edison, his voice shaking.

"You could never be sure that Marion hadn't told him about it. Then again your hatred for Dudley had never left you."

They had arrived at the door to Edison's office and stopped in front of it. This section was not as crowded with people.

Edison turned to face Cornell squarely. Arms akimbo, his lips twitching nervously, he almost shouted at Cornell:

"We're going to see about this, Cornell. We'll damn well see whether you can go around with that damn smug

look on your face and say anything you choose to anybody you choose. We'll see if I can't force you to produce your informant. God damn it, *we'll see about it,*" and he whirled around, entered his office, and slammed the door.

CHAPTER XVII

PAULINE stared at the number she had written down on the pad near the telephone in her bedroom. Regent-2-6606. The number Dr. Cornell had given her. Once she had started to dial the number, then stopped. Whose was it? She knew, without admitting it to herself.

He upset her, that tan haired, dark eyed, Alexander Cornell, yet now she liked him. He could know things, her instincts told her, yet she could trust him.

A feeling of determination surged through her and she dialed the number. She could feel her heart beating as she waited while the phone rang at the other end. Indeed, the moment the receiver was lifted, and before the party spoke, she knew it would be Roff.

"Oh . . ." she said weakly. "I didn't know it was your number, Roff."

Roff sounded far from happy. "I gave it to Cornell in case you had a change of heart. It's my private, unlisted number."

"I'm flattered."

"Yes," he said, and there was a strained silence betwen them.

"I'm sorry I've disturbed you, Roff. Excuse me."

"Wait a minute . . ." he said hastily.

Don't listen, don't listen, she thought wildly. If he talks you into seeing him once again, you're finished; you'll never give him up no matter what.

". . . I want to see you," Roff went on. "It's really important."

"Indeed? It won't accomplish anything, Roff."

"We'll see. This is good news for you."

Oh, golly, what a laugh. Good news for her! There was no such thing in her life. It was the star under which she was born.

But she heard herself saying into the phone:

"All right, Roff. You can come over here."

"Make it the Zoo. Same place in a half hour. Do you mind?"

"No. I'll leave now," and she hung up knowing it would be much harder, now, facing him at their meeting place, with its sentimental memories.

THERE he was, standing in his usual position before the monkey cage. Tall, blond, so handsome in a rugged way, she found herself thinking, and the nearer she came to him the more her heart pounded, the weaker her knees felt, and the clearer his image became in her brain.

As I come closer, she said to herself, he focuses more clearly. Almost as though it were a sign he is entering my life again.

"Roff. . . ." she said.

He took her arm and led her to the bench between the two trees. They sat down, looking at each other.

"Pauline, stop me if I'm wrong. Your father, Adam Setton, and his wife, Ruth, were driving, on the morning of June second, 1926, along Third Avenue in the Bronx . . ."

Confusion swept through her mind and she tightened up. "Oh, Roff, where . . .?"

"Bother the q u e s t i o n s," Roff snapped, "and listen: When the car your parents were riding in—a four door Chevvy—reached the corner of One Hundred and Sixtieth Street, a little child ran out from the curb. To

avoid hitting the child, Adam Setton swung to the left, and then to avoid hitting head-on into a truck coming down, swung hard to the right, which brought him around the child and to the right of the truck and on the way to safety, except that a steel pillar holding up the Third Avenue El blocked his way. This necessitated another sharp turn to the right. He lost control, the car skidded on the wet cobblestones, and smashed into the building wall."

"You mean . . .?" It was still hazy to her. The whole thing would not stand still so that she could examine it. But she was aware of a glorious sense of being which filled her body.

"Of course," said Roff. "Your father *didn't* commit suicide, it was an *accident*."

"But how . . .?" Oh, glory! If only she had known this when Dudley was alive. If she could have tossed it at his jeering face.

"The newspapers, my dear," said Roff. "The Bronx Home News carried a full account of it, while the Manhattan papers only had small items. A good lawyer knows where to lay his hands on research data."

"Oh, Roff, I didn't want you involved with a girl who might have inherited insanity," the tears filled her eyes and she turned her head away, dabbing them with her handkerchief.

"Cornell gets part of the credit," Roff said. "He suggested that I look it up."

She turned her face back to him. "Of course, I'm delighted, Roff. I can't thank you enough, and I realize if I hadn't been so stubborn, if only I had confided in you. But Roff, there are other things. Not only my involvement in the murders. I think of you, of your father, the Senator, and . . . Roff, walk away. Make it easy for me."

Roff smiled. "You send me away."

"I couldn't. Ever again."

"Hell, it was only a simple park flirtation," Roff rubbed in.

"I didn't mean that. You *know* I didn't."

"Pauline," he became serious, "the trouble is that when you're faced with a problem you become full of self-sympathy and fear, instead of directing that same energy to solving the problem. You've tortured yourself with the idea you might have inherited insanity. I didn't worry about it, I traced it down, and behold! the whole thing dissolved into no problem at all."

"The other . . . thing, isn't quite so simple."

"Tell me. Get it off your chest. We'll attack it with two heads. I love you, Pauline. Let me prove it."

"Oh, Roff . . . I must think. I'm back from where I started now. I felt better when I thought I had succeeded in keeping you out of it, but now . . ."

"Think all you want to . . . then call me."

She nodded, got up and walked away. This time she did look back at him and her heart filled with emotion.

CHAPTER XVIII

SERENA was sitting in the big easy chair opposite the desk when Cornell came in. He was carrying several magazines.

"I love this chair," she smiled, patting the arms of it affectionately. "I never want to leave its security."

Cornell handed the magazine to her, then sat down behind his desk and stared thoughtfully into space.

"What's the matter, Alex?" said Serena, a look of fear flitting across her face.

"I had it out with Dr. Edison. I put the whole accusation to him, quite bluntly. The abortion he performed on Edna-Anne was legal to the Nth

degree. She was married at the time and had a kidney condition which warranted the foetus curettage. No evidence that he is running an abortion mill, except the suggestion by your dream."

"He wouldn't permit evidence to be lying about, waiting to be picked up," Serena pointed out. The look of fear had left her eyes and was again filled with whimsicality.

"I guess not," said Cornell. "Thing is, I feel a little like a rotter, accusing him in that manner. He was rather indignant."

"I know better than to argue with you," said Serena. Her hair was upsweep, and Cornell's eyes fastened on her slender white neck. "Some times I hate you terribly."

"Mmmm?"

"You don't care very much whether I hate you or not, do you?" A hard look formed on her lips and she crossed her knees.

"No," said Cornell. "Main thing I want from you is the answer to the Black Key."

She started to make a remark, stopped, then said, "Let's not argue. Perhaps it's my fault for being irritable. Once or twice during a day I get a peculiar feeling, a vague impression that my mind is making some contact with my past life. I become dazed and I try to clutch at it, but it goes away. It's then that I seem to become irritable and hate you for it." She waited for him to answer.

He didn't. He took out his small notebook, thumbed through to the dream page, and read to her:

"In the clouds you met your prince charming. His face was hypnotized and like a red drum which he kept beating with his fist."

He stopped reading and looked at her.

"Thing is, Serena, it keeps pointing to Richard Briggs as your prince charming. 'In the clouds' again refers to Richard's having been in the Air Force. Your conscious reactions is away from that, but it keeps popping up. Point is, why is Richard's face hypnotized? Can you produce an association?" He pushed the cowlick off his forehead.

"I get the same mental picture—the man with the thick glasses."

"Is he the ugly man of the dream?"

"I don't know." She closed her eyes. "For a brief moment I think he is, then it slips away."

"Listen to the next part of it: '. . . *and like a big, red drum, which he beats with his fists.*' "

Serena said promptly, "It's still there, the pair of thick glasses. It makes me want to scream," she added. But there was no indication of tension in her voice and Cornell looked up at her, puzzled.

"His face is like a red drum. Why is he beating his face? Why have you made him punish himself?"

She opened her eyes and smiled at him, wearily.

"You ask me questions, and I don't even know what Richard Briggs looks like, except from your description that he is very handsome, and very dark, and tall."

Suddenly, Cornell sat forward in his seat.

"The whole sequence of hypnotized face, drum beating with the hands—all are integral parts of witchcraft. Those are the associations the average person makes in connection with witchcraft: savages beating a drum and chanting and a Zombie-like person walking toward the drums, a hypnotized look on his face."

"Then . . . Richard . . . .?"

"Uh-huh. He sent the witchcraft picture to his uncle, and since we know that the witchcraft picture was meant to establish intent for Dudley's mur-

der . . ."

"Then Richard murdered his uncle," Serena said, frowning.

"But you insist the man with the thick glasses, Dr. Edison, is your association for your prince charming. So it must be one or the other."

"I don't know," said Serena.

"My guess is Richard. I'll try him first." He sighed. "I can now build a case against Richard, Dr. Edison, Alfred Knight, his daughter, Edna-Anne, and, of course, you."

"What about Roff?" said Serena.

THERE was a silence in the room, drawn out by Cornell's refraining from comment to her question. The silence dragged on for perhaps two full minutes.

Then Serena opened her eyes wide, alarmed.

"Alex, what *is* the matter?"

Cornell said softly, *"I have never mentioned the name Roff to you."*

"No . . .!" A look of the hunted crossed fitfully from her eyes to her forehead down to her mouth.

"He came here once and I spoke to him in the waiting room, a good distance from the bedroom where you were sleeping. I knew you were sleeping because I looked in before the bell rang. Serena, *what* are you trying to pull?"

"Oh, God! You think . . . ?" She leaned her head back and closed her eyes.

"How did you know the name Roff?"

"I didn't Alex, I *swear* I didn't. I was just sitting here and I asked about him."

Something like a dull weight lifted off Cornell's heart. "Well," he said, "it's not unusual for amnesia victims to blurt out a name they knew prior to their attacks. Evidently, you did exactly that. Try now to remember more about the name Roff. The last name is Inglewood."

"Nothing, Alex. The name is as foreign to me as was my own when you told me what it was."

"All right," said Cornell. "I don't think it means anything."

"I hope you're right," she said softly.

"Oh, I . . ."

She cut in, "Don't say it. Please don't *say* it. It's written all over your face, in your voice. Alexander Cornell is always right."

Cornell shrugged. "If I were such an infallible individual, I'd have turned you over to the police Monday night."

"Why didn't you?"

"I felt sorry for you. I wanted to help you."

"And, of course," she mocked, "your own scientific interest was piqued. Here was a ripe guinea pig for you. Break her down, break her down. Solve the case from her dream, then run to the police and say, 'Behold! I, Cornell The Great, using my great genius . . .'"

"You have a sharp tongue," snapped Cornell, not amused.

The ringing of the phone interrupted any remark she might have made.

"Now, Alex," boomed the voice of the District Attorney, "it's time for an accounting."

Cornell's heart fell.

"It is . . . ?" he said. He glanced at Serena, who was watching him and listening, too.

"A Dr. Burton Edison just left my office, furious as a roped bull. You openly accused him of doing illegal abortions and had there been a third party as witness to your statements, the doctor would have had a case of slander against this office. For God's sake, Alex, what are you doing?"

"I had gotten a tip that Edison might be engaged in such activities. I checked

on it."

"Well, why don't you bring these bits of information to Ed Sands, or to me, Alex?" the D.A.'s voice became soothing, placating. "What mess are you in?"

"Look, Chief," Cornell said. "I went to see Dudley Briggs to tell him about his nurse, Marion Hillman, being murdered. It seems the old boy had received a witchcraft picture in the mail and was beginning to become annoyed and ill over it. He asked me to help him find the sender of that picture. I liked Dudley. He was an old crank, but a likable one, and so I did a bit of snooping on my own. Any complete evidence I secure will go to you."

"I know, I know," said the D.A. "But you knew the girl was a nurse *before* you saw Dudley Briggs the next day."

CORNELL remained silent, holding his breath for what he knew was coming. It came.

"Alex, I'm going to have to suspend you from the department for awhile," the D. A. said, sounding regretful.

Shocked, although he had expected it, Cornell said:

"What ever you think best, Chief."

"I can't let your personal mix-up in this thing endanger the integrity of the D.A.'s office. That means you needn't bother reporting here Monday for my trial case."

"I understand," said Cornel.

"Unless . . . you want to come over here right now, give me everything you've uncovered, make a clean breast of it, and promise to do only the work I assign to you."

Cornell looked at Serena sitting opposite him, a small woman, a beautiful woman—but a lost woman. It would be simple, now, to confess to the D.A. But what about Serena . . .?

"Thanks, Chief," he said finally. "I'll accept the suspension." He hung up, reluctantly, quickly, before he could change his mind. He felt like a man suddenly stripped of his clothing in a public arena. Although he never consciously realized it, he knew now that his connection with the D.A.'s office had provided him with an authority and importance he now lacked, and missed. He could understand, better, Richard's lust for political power, for in a small way, he himself—as all men do—had really wanted a badge of authority.

BUNNY CRAIG stood at the newsstand on the corner, reading the headlines, the cigarette dangling from his thick lips. The moment Alexander Cornell came out the front entrance, he stepped away from the stand and waited. He watched Cornell round the corner of The Avenue Of The Americas, allowed himself five minutes extra in case, Craig told himself, 'e forgot somethin', which these damn psychiatrists are always doin'.

Then he walked across the street, went into the building and rang the bell of Cornell's apartment-office. As he had expected, there was no answer.

Bunny Craig grinned to himself, greatly amused. He came out again, went through the service entrance to the rear court-yard to the windows of Cornell's apartment. The blinds were drawn tightly, as he knew they would be, having investigated yesterday.

He tapped on the window of the bedroom and waited. Nothing happened.

He tapped again, this time in a rhythmic tempo and kept it up. Then he saw a cautious movement of a slat in the center of the venetian blind and a pair of large gray eyes looked through. He stepped back, grinned broadly at the eyes, pointed to his chest, then to the

window, and indicated he was going around to the front and wanted entrance to the apartment. The slat closed.

In the lobby, he again rang the bell, and immediately the door was opened. Serena stood there and he edged his way in. She closed the door and followed him into the waiting room.

"Ah, we meet again," said Craig, easily, sitting down.

"Who . . . w-who are you?" Serena stammered, her face white and drawn.

"Aw, come off it, Ma'am. Y'know me, you do."

"Please . . . I *don't* know you. But I have the impression I should. I opened the door to you because you frightened me and because I am sure you can . . . t-tell me something about myself."

" 'Ere, what kind o' talk is this?" Craig frowned. He hadn't bargained for this. "I am no idiot, Ma'am."

"What is your name?"

"Craig. *Mr.* Bunny Craig."

"You see, Mr. Craig . . . I've been suffering from an attack of amnesia. I don't know anything of my past at all." She waved her hands futilely. "Dr. Cornell has been kind enough to keep me here and has been trying to cure me of it."

Craig frowned suspiciously at her.

"This on the level, Ma'am?"

"Oh, I'm telling you the truth. Please believe me. That's why I'm so anxious to know what you can tell me about myself. You're from England. Do I know you from London?"

Craig chuckled. "Aye, only I be an American citizen. Born in London, came 'ere, went back to London to see me dear old mother, and was caught there by the war. Wot now, Miss Chalmers."

"You . . . y-you know my name."

"An' a good deal more . . . for sale, Ma'am," Craig rubbed his hands together.

"I have no money, Mr. Craig." Her eyes hardened. Craig, looking at the cold determination in her eyes, felt a little uneasy.

He shrugged. "I can't help that Ma'am."

"Unless Dr. Cornell . . .?" she stared at him thoughtfully. "I simply *must* find out more about myself."

"I already had a run in with your doctor," said Craig, smiling. "A terrible boxer an' a lousy detective, I tell you."

She shook her head. "He never makes the same mistake twice. Believe me, he's terribly clever, Mr. Craig."

"Aw, now, do wot you want, Ma'am. Maybe you can touch him up at that . . . " his eyes glanced over her body.

She turned her head away. "I'll try to think of something. I'm sure he'll help me." Her white hands curled into small, round fists.

CHAPTER XIX

CORNELL found Richard sitting in the expensive library, smoking his curved-stem pipe, one foot flung over the arm of the chair. He looked up at the psychiatrist, a sheepish expression on his face and pointed to a seat opposite him.

"How do you feel?" Cornell asked, sitting down.

"Headache, that's all. I'm not a *drunkard,* you know," Richard said, seriously. "Drinking and politics do not go together."

"You're quite serious about being a politician?"

Richard nodded his dark, handsome face, and his black eyes glowed. "I don't aspire too high, doctor. Not the presidency or anything like that. A Congressman is good enough—for a start. And I back up my dream with

work and study. Political economy and such."

"You don't hold your liquor any too well," smiled Cornell.

"I'm sorry about last night," Richard said. "I didn't mean to put my hands on an older and smaller man."

Cornell shrugged. "Forget it . . . You seem chipper this morning. What happened, Dudley's will probated?"

"You're a mean devil, doctor," Richard smiled, "But I won't get sore. Not today. I do have an appointment with Dudley's lawyer and he's going to give me the glad tidings."

"Well, you finally made it, Richard. You're on easy street. Now how do you feel toward Dudley? Still bitter because he took you from your parents?"

"Did I tell you that?" Richard said, surprised. "Shux, I *must* have been potted."

"What about witchcraft?"

"Huh?" Richard's black eyes burned into his.

"The picture that was sent to Dudley. I believe you sent it yourself," said Cornell, bluntly.

A curious change came over Richard's face, and Cornell tried to capture it and analyze it. It was a blending of surprise, anger, bewilderment and amusement.

Richard said, finally, "And what ever put that idea into your head?"

"What difference?" said Cornell. "I'm simply asking you, did you send it?"

"Of course," said Richard, with equal frankness. His lids closed slightly as though he were trying to figure Cornell out to some degree of satisfaction. The psychiatrist simply brushed the cowlick off his forehead with the back of his hand and looked surprised.

"You really did?" he asked.

Richard's eyes narrowed.

"Now look here, pal. You barge in here, bluntly tell me I sent the witchcraft picture to Dudley. I admit it readily. Then you're flabbergasted. Can't I ever please you?"

"I'm trying to decide whether you meant what you said, or if you're being sarcastic. Sarcasm is part of a future politician's stock-in-trade."

"Well, I meant it." There was no doubting his sincerity now, Cornell saw.

"Do you realize the implications?"

"Sure. It follows that you'd think I also killed Marion Hillman and Dudley."

"Why, in Heaven's name, did you send Dudley that picture?" Cornell waved his hands.

"I was confused at the time. You see . . ." He grinned a little. "It was because of Pauline. She was becoming more and more morose. Uncle Dudley kept needling her about her father, riding her prettey hard. I thought she might . . ."

"Kill Dudley?"

"Well, no. I didn't think of that then. I had a vague idea that if Dudley was given something to worry about, he'd stop hounding Pauline. I was afraid she might pull a suicide act."

"Oh, come," said Cornell making a wry face. "Let's admit that it would have suited you fine to have had Pauline commit suicide. She cut your inheritance in half and you resented it."

HE SHRUGGED at Cornell and then grinned. "I'm stuck with that story—and so are you."

"You could have gone straight to Dudley and told him to stop hounding Pauline. He would have listened. He was afraid of you."

"Oh, nuts, he wasn't afraid of me."

"He knew that your main concern was his money. He knew you wanted to marry Edna-Anne for her money.

He knew to what lengths you would go for money. He knew the bitterness you carried in your heart. He knew your violent temper. I believe you're lying."

Richard put his pipe on the table and shrugged again. "Nothing I can say will convince you Let's drop it."

"Did *you* know that Edna-Anne had been married, divorced, and had undergone an abortion?"

"Sure."

"It bothered your uncle that you should want to marry such a girl, seven years older than you, for money—but it didn't bother you?"

"That's not fair," Richard snapped. "It's no reflection on a girl to be divorced, or to have a legal abortion when her health won't permit bearing a child." Richard's words were clipped.

"I'm looking at it from Dudley's viewpoint."

"To hell with that."

"Dudley didn't want you to prostitute yourself by marrying a girl for her money," said Cornell. "He jumped on the divorce and abortion as a good excuse to oppose the marriage."

The veins stood out on Richard's neck and Cornell could see his lips drawing tight over his teeth, as the anger was mounting in him.

"Good by," Richard hissed.

Cornell shrugged. "So long," he said and went out.

HE WALKED back to his office, enjoying the warm sun, the cool breeze, the sweet smell of the clean air. And he was confused at Richard's attitude. He was certain, now, that Richard hadn't sent Dudley that witchcraft picture. Yet Richard had taken the blame. Why? And he felt, too, that Richard knew the source of his information.

He stopped off at the drug store and had a coke and bought a packet of cigarettes. Never a heavy smoker, he found himself using a pack a day lately. Then he went back to his office.

In the lobby he smelled smoke. The closer he came to his own door, the stronger the odor was, and a fit of panic burst in his brain. He fumbled as he hurried to open the door, and when he did and stepped inside, the odor assailed him full in the face.

His eyes smarting and tearing, he ran into the apartment, dashing along the hallway, through the consultation room, and into the kitchen.

Serena was standing there, her eyes also tearing, waving the smoke away with a magazine. Then, through the haze, she saw Cornell.

"Alex . . . help me."

"For heaven's sake, what happened?" Cornell shouted.

"I was making a pot roast of the left over steak and left it cooking. I guess I fell asleep. Oh, I'm so sorry. . . ."

Cornell laughed, a hearty laugh of relief that verged on hysteria.

"Come along into the office," he gasped, still laughing, "and close the door. The smoke will evaporate."

Suddenly, the door bell began to ring insistently. "Quick," Cornell told Serena, "get into the bathroom and lock the door." Then he ran to the door and opened it.

The superintendent of the building stood there, white-faced. "Dr. Cornell . . . I seen smoke comin' outta the window. Fire?"

"No, no," Cornell smiled at him. "I was cooking some meat and it burnt. Fell asleep, you know."

"Oh." The super sighed. "I turned in the fire alarm. I better call 'em and cancel it."

"Please do, and hurry," Cornell said, alarmed.

But it was too late. He could hear the wailing of the sirens coming closer.

He closed the door in the super's face, said, "Keep them out of here," when the door was half shut, ran back to the bathroom door, called to Serena, "Stay there. Don't come out until I tell you," and dashed back to the front of the apartment to wait.

They barged in, shortly, four firemen, pushing the super aside as he tried to explain. Four burly firemen, wearing their helmets and raincoats, carrying axes. A policeman followed them.

"It's nothing boys," Cornell shouted, feeling so helpless in the face of this barrage, and he was getting mad—mad at his impotence, mad at his fear of Serena being discovered.

The firemen started looking around. "Get the kitchen," the leader said. They branched out, an irrisistible force, and searched the apartment. One came back and reported, "The bathroom's locked. Should I bust it in?"

"Look here!" snorted Cornell, "I told you there was no fire. That's a patient in the bathroom. *I burned a piece of meat!*" he shrieked at them.

THE firemen came back and assembled in the waiting room and the leader said, calmly, "Okay, okay, mister. Don't blow your top. Some day when you really get a blaze goin' here I'm gonna let you burn to the ground." They trouped out, grumbling, the policeman looking greatly amused.

Cornell went back, called for Serena to come out, then he sat down at his desk, shaking all over. He regretted his outburst at the men who were only doing their duty. There was no doubt his nerves were on edge, and he couldn't afford to get flustered. Too much remained to be done.

Serena sat down in the chair, quietly.

"I'm sorry, Alex," she whispered. "Everything I do is wrong . . . It's that dreadful little man."

Cornell's head shot up and his eyes fastened on hers.

"What little man?" he said.

"That nasty Mr. Craig, the cockney."

"He was in here?" His throat hurt from the screaming at the firemen.

"Y-y-yes," she said, fretfully.

" I was afraid of that!" sighed Cornell, rocking his head back and forth and pressing his temples with his palms.

"I realize it was stupid of me," she explained, nervously watching his face. "He knocked on the window, from the courtyard. I peeked out and saw him. The moment I saw him I was certain I knew him in my past. Honestly, Alex . . . I wouldn't have let him in if I hadn't thought he could help me—us. . . ." She started to cry, covering her face with the palms of her small, white hands.

Cornell felt no compassion for her. "I left you strict orders to see no one . . . Oh, stop the sniveling. What else happened?"

"He told me he knew me in London," she said, drying her eyes. "He wanted money for what he could tell me and I told him I had none. I tried to coax him to tell me something, but he wouldn't."

"Go on."

"I told him I would try to . . ."

"Get the money from me?" Cornell finished for her.

She nodded.

"Then what?"

"He's coming back . . . to see you."

"And how much does he want?" Cornell's voice was mocking.

"Ten thousand dollars . . ." She began to cry again. "H-he's coming back Saturday morning." She buried her face in her arms and sobbed, "Oh, Alex, I botched everything up, didn't I?"

"Frankly," said Cornell, "you certainly did."

CHAPTER XX

CORNELL took a cold shower and then filled the tub, lay down in it and tried to compose himself. He told himself that his life had been changed, but changed by necessity not by his own volition. True, he did make the decision to keep Serena and try to help her . . . but would he have done so, had he known what the results were to be? Yes, the tiny little voice in back of his mind told him he would do it all over again.

But not, he smiled grimly to himself, without boxing lessons first.

Serena knocked on the door and called out, "Alex, I've placed out a complete change of clothing for you, on the couch."

He dressed and idled away some of the afternoon trying to relax. But it was no use, his mind kept coming back to the problems on hand, and so he called Serena into the office and bade her lie on the couch.

"Another session?" she said.

"Another, and yet another, and so on till we break it down. Thanks for laying out my clothes."

She didn't go to the couch, she stood standing in the center of the room. "I . . . I like doing things for you, Alex. Even at the times I hate you.

Cornell went around turning off the lights.

"Can't I use the chair instead of the couch," she asked.

"Where ever you feel more relaxed," he said.

She sat down in the easy chair and closed her eyes. Cornell read to her from the notebook:

" 'Suddenly you saw a man with a mustache and a beard dressed in a black robe and he was angry at you.' What can you associate for this man?"

There was a long silence in the room.

Cornell helped her: "It can be a judge, the black robe is symbolic of that. The mustache and beard are also symbols of a man in authority. A father, a clergyman, a professor, the police."

"The police are angry at me?"

"For not telling them who the ugly man is, and what the Black Key means. Your own mind knows you are guilty of a breach in law in blacking out into amnesia so you couldn't reveal the murderer."

Her eyes still closed, she said, "I see a man, now, but he's not a policeman. He's a kindly old man with a van Dyke —and he's not angry at me. He is lecturing me in a soft voice."

"Is this man your Analyst?"

"I don't know. It doesn't impress me that way."

"Try to think of your days at the University of Heidelberg."

She shrugged, shaking her head.

"Blank, blank. Darkness. That's what I see."

"I am," said Cornell, "going to assume that the man with the beard and the black robe is the dean of the medical school you attended, and that he is angry with you for flunking out."

She nodded and said nothing.

Then Cornell said, "Serena, why are you afraid of drugs?"

Her eyes shot open. "Oh . . . Alex. You want to . . .?"

"Uh-huh. We're back to narco-analysis again."

"Why can't I be strong," Serena moaned. "Why am I such a coward? I'm so afraid of . . . of even the mention of drugs."

"Thing is, it *might* just work in your case. The only way we can tell is to try it."

She stood up and walked over to the desk. "Please, Alex . . . let's try a little while longer. Please. I'll work

very hard with you."

"All right," Cornell said, smiling at her. He could yield to her now. When the time was ripe, he was determined to use the narco-synthesis.

Her eyes glowed gratefully. "You're so very, *very* good to me, Alex. . . . No matter how this turns out . . . no matter how you feel about me . . . I'll always love you."

"Thank you," said Cornell and he felt uncomfortable.

She walked away, to the bedroom, as the phone rang. Cornell lifted the receiver, said hello, then Alfred Knight said:

"Will you be in your office in fifteen minutes?" his voice was gruff.

"Yes, I think so."

"You think, or you're sure. I don't want to come down there for nothing."

"I only think, Mr. Knight. I'm sure of nothing in this life except that it ends, sooner or later—like this telephone conversation," and Cornell hung up.

ALFRED KNIGHT came in about fifteen minutes. Cornell admitted him and led him back into his consultation room, both men not speaking.

Knight sat down in the stuffed easy chair and when he sank all the way down in it, his face showed his surprise. "No wonder," he said finally, "you get away with all that hocus-pocus you psychiatrists pull on innocent people. This chair hypnotizes a guy without moving."

"A psychological advantage," admitted Cornell.

"Sure. You sink into this booby trap and have to look up at Cornell, sitting there at the desk like some high Lama waiting to pass judgment. That look on your face shows you enjoy it, too." Knight bit off the end of a cigar and lighted it. He blew the smoke toward the desk, but not with intent to reach Cornell.

"That habit of yours of blowing smoke into people's faces," said Cornell, "is very significant. It depicts your struggle for superiority. You were born poor, weren't you?"

"So what?"

"That habit indicates you try to obscure other people by the strength of your own personality. The fact that you failed is obvious. Had your personality been strong enough, the unconscious mind wouldn't have manifested the symbol of blowing the smoke."

Knight grinned. "All that from smoking a cigar?"

"Every motion, Mr. Knight, every habit, every action, every word is a tip-off of each individual's fundamental unconscious drives, hence, character."

"Okay, okay," said Knight, waving his cigar. "Now let's talk about some real psychology."

Cornell waited.

"Money," said Knight. "The psychology of you getting yourself five thousand dollars."

Cornell puckered his lips and raised his eyebrows. "That is a considerable amount of money."

"You bet your sweet life it is. A doc don't go around picking it off trees."

"What do I do to get it?"

"Stop snooping. Forget all about the murder of Marion Hillman and Dudley Briggs. It doesn't mean anything to you personally."

The devil it doesn't, thought Cornell grimly.

"Why, Mr. Knight?"

The wealthy florist blew smoke rings toward the ceiling, hesitated a moment. A frown crossed his face, achieved its purpose, then he decided.

"I'll be very frank, Cornell." He dumped the ashes into the tray on the

end table. "It's . . . my daughter."

"You think Edna-Anne killed Marion and Dudley?"

"I don't think so . . . But in her state of mind. Damn it, Cornell, I'm not sure. She's crazy about Richard. Even I, her father, don't know how far she'd go to get him. Now he's turned her down and it breaks my heart to see her so unhappy."

"She has had a difficult time of it, that divorce and the abortion," agreed Cornell.

"I won't even act surprised at your knowing that," sighed Knight, but his face showed the surprise anyway. He touched his heavy, sandy-colored mustache with thumb and forefinger. Some of the gruffness had gone out of his voice.

"What did happen to her first marriage?"

"He was a louse!" Knight's belligerant manner came alive again. "He demanded too much of her and I stepped in."

"What did he demand?"

"What's the difference now?" he scowled.

"A considerable difference. I want to get the proper perspective as to where you fit into your daughter's life. You seem to have managed to slice a huge portion for yourself."

"He was a religious zealot—some cult I never even heard of—a feeling Edna-Anne didn't feel with him."

"Didn't she know that before the marriage?"

"Yes, but they agreed that each could pursue their own ideas of worship. After the marriage, the klutz forgot his agreement. Then, of course, he didn't like me. He wanted Edna-Anne to stop seeing me." Knight puffed furiously on the cigar, as though indignant still at the act.

"Just like that?" Cornell snapped his fingers.

"He was jealous of her love for me. I told you he was a dope. He objected to Edna-Anne's abortion. I blackened an eye for him, paid him off, and sent him away. Edna-Anne got a divorce."

"You love your daughter very much."

A LOOK of comfort crossed Knight's face. "Cornell, Edna-Anne is all I've got to live for. Her mother died when she was born and I raised her. She's been my companion for thirty odd years—and you can't work that off over night."

"Not a very normal relationship, I'm afraid," grimaced Cornell, with his usual frankness.

"Why?"

"A girl doesn't divorce her husband because of her father. Not normally, anyway."

"He was no damn good. I didn't want my doll hurt."

"That's another thing, calling her 'doll.' Don't you realize that by calling her that atrocious name you only make her more aware of her plain appearance?"

"To me she's a doll face. No goddam man is good enough for her. Certainly not that weak-spined Richard Briggs. But she's nuts about him. He's the only man who could. . . ." he hated to say it, Cornell saw ". . . who could turn her against me. And I know it."

"And now that he's inherited Dudley's estate, he jilted her," Cornell dug.

"God damn him!" said Knight viciously.

"And you're not sure that Edna-Anne didn't kill the nurse and Dudley. Marion because Richard was in love with her—or so Edna-Anne thought—then Dudley because he stood in the way of the marriage."

"Yes."

"Haven't you spotted the flaw in the ointment?"

"Huh?"

"Edna-Anne would have defeated her own purpose in killing Dudley. With him alive, thus leaving Richard *without* the money, she'd have a better chance of getting the handsome devil."

"But with him alive, she knew he'd oppose the marriage," countered Knight, looking confused.

"Of course," said Cornell, "Dudley might have gotton some inclination she had killed his nurse . . ."

"Yes."

". . . or that you, so definite in your anxiety to insure your daughter's happiness, conceived the one way of insuring it. Eliminate the two persons who stood in the way of it."

Knight stood up. "When do you want the money?"

"I don't."

"What?" Alfred Knight's face turned white and he clenched his fists. "Damn you, Cornell, you led me to believe you'd accept it. You've strung me along, pumping me, playing me for a fool."

"I did take advantage. I wish I could say I was sorry, but you would have done the same," answered Cornell, watching the taller man warily.

Knight stood there, scowling, controlling himself, his lean body tight, the muscles of his jaw moving constantly.

"All right, Cornell," he said finally. "Get out your pencil and paper and put down my confession. I killed Marion Hillman and Dudley Briggs."

Cornell smiled. "No go, Mr. Knight. I'm not *that* big a fool. Nothing can be proved against you; later you could deny the confession. Maybe you did kill Marion and Dudley. I don't know yet. Right now, I don't believe you."

"As you wish," said Knight, suddenly calm. "You know the saying, fight fire with fire. I'll do that," and he picked up his hat and walked out.

Serena didn't come out of the bedroom and when Cornell went to see what she was doing, he found her sleeping on the bed. He went back to his office, took off his jacket, and figured on taking a nap himself.

He did snooze for about twenty minutes when the ringing of the phone woke him up. It was Ed Sands, and his usual calm voice was now agitated.

"Doc, listen to me and act quickly. Dr. Burton Edison has gotten the Homicide Squad to swear out a search warrant and he and Lieutenant Soose will be along in about a half hour. I haven't told the Chief yet—but clean up in a hurry whatever it is." He hung up without waiting for an answer.

Cornell sat holding the receiver in his hand and he felt as though a bolt of lightning has passed through him.

CHAPTER XXI

IT TOOK a full sixty seconds for the shock to wear off and for him to spring into action. This was not the proper cut for the pattern of Alexander Cornell's life—not the police asking a court for a search warrant of his apartment. He could suffer that indignity with a stoic calm of righteousness, except that the search would incriminate him, once and for all.

The ten minutes that followed were the most hectic he had ever lived through. First he barged into the bedroom and woke Serena and blurted out the news to her. Unlike himself, she did not become panicky, but looked at him with a calm that put him to shame.

"There's a small valise in the closet. Pack your few things, and for Heaven's sake gather up all the hairpins and what-nots."

Then he dashed to the phone, called his garage, and told them to deliver his car in a hurry. "Emergency call," he explained.

He looked on the couch. There were two hairpins near the head and these he put in his pocket. Back to the bedroom and Serena was all packed. He glanced over the dresser but could see no hairpins.

"Everything out of the closet?"

She nodded and stood there, holding the valise. At that moment Cornell's protective instinct soared to new heights as he regarded her, small and slim, her face so calm, but her eyes filled with anxiety and uncertainty.

That had taken five minutes. The next five minutes, waiting for the car to arrive, were sheer torture. There was nothing to do but wait, and pray the police wouldn't get there first. Cornell went outside, Serena waiting with her valise in the foyer of the apartment. The car hadn't arrived.

It was supper hour in Manhattan, and fortunately not many people were circulating about the building. He paced nervously up and down the street, went to the corner, back to the door, back again to the corner.

Then his '41 green Buick sedan came, tailing a motorcycle behind, and parked in front of his building. He waited until the garage man had detached the motorcycle and roared away before going back into his apartment.

He picked up the valise and said to Serena, "When I give two short blows on the horn, you come out."

As he walked out, three women came from the elevator and walked out with him. He put the valise in the car, then got in. He started the motor, then gave two short blows on the horn and opened the back door. Serena came out, walking straight, her head slightly lowered. She got into the car and he said, "Sit on the floor, Serena."

She wiggled down and he slipped the car into first and eased away. Not until he had gotten onto the West Side Highway at Fifty-seventh Street did he feel any lessening of the tension inside him.

"Whew," he sighed deeply. "Thank God for Ed Sands."

Serena was silent, sitting on the floor of the car. After a moment, she said, "What now, Alex?"

"There's a sanitarium in Pelham I send patients to," said Cornell. "I'll bring you in as a patient. Thing is, we've got to play this smart. Now, you're suffering from delusions. You are convinced your name is Serena Chalmers and that you killed Marion Hillman."

"Oh, Alex. . . ."

"Leave the rest to me, please. All you do is tell the truth. Insist you're Serena Chalmers."

"Yes," she said weakly. Then, "Alex, do you hate me? For messing up your freedom this way? Is it my fault? Did I take advantage of you?"

"Don't be silly," he said, and thought how true her statements were, indeed.

She went on, "Alex, don't be angry. I'm afraid I botched it again."

His heart hung in suspension and he couldn't breathe. No . . . not after all this trouble.

"I've only one of my pearl earrings," she said. "I can't find the other."

"That's nice," he said, letting out air. "Oh, that's very nice. You couldn't have done any better if you were a police stooge."

THE sanitarium, called Bright's, was set aside from the business center and sat on top of a hill, surrounded by an unobtrusive wire fence covered with ivy and vines. The building was three stories, of red brick.

Cornell, carrying the valise, walked

with Serena into the lobby, then into the office of the director, a Dr. Finell. Dr. Finell had slick black hair and a tiny black mustache. He was slender, and almost effeminate in actions. Cornell never knew where culture ended, in Dr. Finell, and something else began.

"Dr. Cornell, good to see you," Finell greeted him, rising from his desk. His dark eyes glanced at Serena for a second, then back to Cornell.

"This is Miss Julia Adams," Cornell said.

"I'm delighted," Finell bowed.

"Miss Adams is a patient of mine. Can you put her up for a rest? Short time?"

"*De-* lighted," fawned Dr. Finell. He paced back to his desk and pushed a button. Almost immediately, a hefty nurse with steel gray hair came in. Finell said to her, "Will you take care of Miss Adams? She'll be with us for a while."

The nurse took Serena's valise and then her arm and both were taken from the room, Serena just looking back at Cornell once, fearfully, as though she were saying to him, "It's all up to you now."

Finell sat down, and waved Cornell to a seat.

"I want her guarded," said Cornell. "She's not to get out, and no one is to get in. And . . ." he cocked his head at Finell ". . . no one is to know she is here. She thinks she is Serena Chalmers, a murder suspect, but she is Julia Adams. Her family are prominent and wealthy people and you know . . ." he trailed off significantly.

Finell nodded. "Leave it to me, Dr. Cornell. Let me handle it for you."

IT WAS eight o'clock when Cornell arrived back at his office. He wondered what had happened. Had the police forced their way in, or hadn't they arrived?

He opened the door with his key and saw that the lights were all on. There was no one in the waiting room and he walked in, feeling a little better. Silence greeted him. In the consultation room, he stopped short.

The District Attorney, huge, gray-haired, smoking his cigar, was sitting in the easy stuffed chair. Behind the desk sat a tall, husky, immaculately dressed man, of about forty, smoking a cigarette through a holder. Cornell recognized him as Lieutenant Frank Soose, of the Homicide Squad. Both men fastened their eyes on Cornell, saying nothing.

"Alex . . ." the D.A. breathed softly, after a moment.

"Sit down, Dr. Cornell," Lieutenant Soose said. He adjusted the knot of his blue and white tie. Soose was what the boys at the Squad called a "dandy" when it came to dressing.

Cornell sat down on the edge of the couch just as Dr. Edison came into the room from the rear of the apartment. When he saw Cornell, his long, thin face broke into a grin.

"Ah," he said, and stood in the doorway, waiting.

"Dr. Cornell, do you know a short, fat man, an English cockney, who . . ."

Cornell cut in, "Bunny Craig. I know him. He's a blackmailer."

Soose went on, "Yes, that's right. We found Bunny Craig dead . . ."

Cornell's head went up.

". . . in the closet of *your* bedroom. He'd been shot through the back of the head."

Thoughts raced through Cornell's brain, with a furious speed. Three pairs of eyes were watching him. Soose's confidently, the D.A.'s sadly, and Edison's triumphantly.

Edison spoke: "And you were horsing me around. *You!*"

"It's a lie," Cornell breathed heavily. "It's some kind of an odious trick."

Soose shrugged. "We have photographs. The apartment has been gone over by my men. Craig was shot with your gun. You have two in the drawer of your desk. A .22 and a .38 calibre. The .22 was used. One bullet is missing. Gun wiped clean. But we found fingerprints of a woman around the house that jibe with fingerprints found in the room of Serena Chalmers at the Briggs home."

"Serena Chalmers was here, Monday night," said Cornell, "wanting me to help her. I told her she must go to the police. She left here intending to. I don't know what happened to her."

"Her fingerprints were found in the bathroom and in the kitchen," Soose said, his voice dripping with honey.

"Alex, you're in a tough spot," the D.A. said. "Of course you know you're *permanently* dropped from my office."

CORNELL looked at Edison. "The Doctor here was the one who instigated the search warrant. Suppose he tells why he suspected anything? Perhaps *he* knows how Craig's body got into my apartment?"

"You knew things only Serena Chalmers could tell. *Only* she," Edison said, nervously. "None of the others told you, I checked on that. I suspected Serena was here. I was right."

Lieutenant Soose said: "Where were you just now, Dr. Cornell? The garage called and I answered the phone. They wanted to know if you knew your gas was low, since you hadn't used the car for over a month?"

It was getting tighter and tighter. He felt like a fly caught in a spider's web. He could see the headlines in the Boston newspapers: *"Alexander Cornell, Eminent Psychiatrist, On Trial For Murder."* A calm descended over him. He was hooked and he knew it. *Think,* he chided himself; *think your way out of this.*

He answered Lieutenant Soose, "I have a patient at Bright's sanitarium in Pelham. You can check on it. I went to see her."

No one spoke and he said to Soose, "What are you going to do?"

"Well . . ." Soose folded his hands behind his neck. "Well, in view of the evidence: body found on your premises, murder weapon being your own gun, fingerprints of Serena Chalmers found, the item of Audrey's shop reporting a man of your description buying clothes for a woman of Serena Chalmers' size . . . all these force me to book you, Dr. Cornell."

"That's ridiculous," Cornell said.

"How did Craig's body get here, then?"

"Almost every suspect in the murder of Marion Hillman and Dudley Briggs has been in this office. All except Pauline Setton and Richard Briggs, who could have found out from the others. My windows are in the alley, unlocked, almost ground level. Any one of them could have brought Craig in and shot him here. While I was out."

"True, but highly improbable."

"You don't have a case for court prosecution anyway," Cornell said to the D.A. "Do you think that if I had killed Bunny Craig, I would have left his body in my closet? Then drive away to leave him for you to find? That I would have wiped finger-prints off the gun where it would be perfectly normal for them to be? The whole thing smells."

"Ah," Edison shot out, "but you didn't *know* there was a search warrant issued."

"The fact is," Cornell said, sensing his advantage, "I did. Ed Sands phoned and told me."

Soose frowned and looked at the D.A. The D.A. rose to his feet, went over to the desk, lifted the receiver and dialed a number. No one spoke while he waited and Cornell let his eyes stay on Edison's face. For the first time in his life he experienced hate. He hated Dr. Edison.

The D.A. spoke to Ed Sands, asked him a question, listened, and hung up. He turned to Soose. "Ed Sands did warn Dr. Cornell. We'd be idiots to believe that Cornell would go out and leave the body here when he had a half hour's time to dispose of it."

He whirled around to Cornell. "However, you're still finished with the District Attorney's office. I warned you and you decided. This is what happened." He picked up his hat and walked out.

Edison hurriedly followed him and then Lieutenant S o o s e stood up. "Nasty," he said. "Nasty buisness." He hunched his shoulders to make his jacket fit snugly. He clicked his teeth, said to Cornell, "You are not to leave this vicinity, Dr. Cornell. That's a police order, pending further investigation," then he, too, walked out of the apartment.

Cornell let his body fall on the couch and he closed his eyes. Bunny Craig had visited Serena here today. Had she shot him with his gun, pushed his body into the closet, waiting for a chance to dispose of the body?

He got up, went into the kitchen, and helped himself to a drink of the eleven year old whiskey. He drank four jigger fulls, then put the half empty bottle away. He took off his jacket and shirt and filled the bathtub with cold water. Lying in the tub, he asked himself where along the way had he touched such a sensitive spot in the murderer as to force such a completely drastic action as this.

CHAPTER XXII

THE dining room had the gloomy atmosphere of a funeral parlor on a stormy night. Richard sat, pecking at his food, his face set, his eyes scowling and angry. Pauline watched him. Rosamond came in with a tray and began picking up the dishes.

"Don' none of yuh et?" she shook her head, wearily, in silent condemnation.

"Excuse me," Pauline said and rose and walked out, across the foyer, into the immense parlor with its Persian rugs, its large couches and easy chairs, its brocaded drapes and marble-fireplace. She had heard the news of Bunny Craig's death over the radio. She sat brooding and lit a cigarette. Richard came in soon and sat down at the other end of the same couch, his jaw hanging, his eyes dull.

"Well, for God's sake," said Pauline. "Don't act as though the world were coming to an end." She pushed her combed-out hair off her neck. She wasn't quite used to her modern type of hair-do.

"*You* can talk. You didn't lose anything," Richard muttered.

"Don't be silly."

"And you have your nice young money-bags tightly sealed, signed and almost delivered," he added, with a touch of malice.

She wished she did, she thought, not answering him. She wished everything was done and over with—but it wasn't.

"The old goat, the miserable old fraud," Richard moaned, sitting with his elbows on his knees, his palms holding up his face. "Not a lousy nickel to his name, putting on those airs of wealth."

"You have half the house," Pauline pointed out, making no apparent effort to hide her satisfaction, "and you have

five thousand in cash."

"It's that . . . that *he led me* to believe it would be a great amount. It's like his reaching out from his grave to give me a final push," snapped Richard, "as though he hadn't done enough to my life since I was four years old."

"You heard the lawyer, Richard. Uncle Dudley did have a lot of money, but he gave it away to many charities. He was afraid of you, Richard, but he never respected you. He wanted you to achieve on your own. Perhaps now you will."

"Oh, nuts," said Richard, straightening up. His handsome face had a resigned look and Pauline looked uneasily at him.

"Hey," he said suddenly, "let's sell this damn house, Pauline. With real estate high, we can get at least a hundred thousand for it."

"Sell this house? No. It's always been my home and I'm attached to it. Indeed, the will said that one couldn't sell without the other's consent."

"What about Roff? Will he live here?"

"I'd like him to," she said, and she thought to herself: He may walk out of here ten minutes after he arrives, because tonight I am going to tell him everything.

"Then have him buy me out. He won't want me hanging around, anyway, and I've no fond memories for this monstrosity or for Uncle Dudley."

"I'll ask him."

"Thanks," said Richard. They sat, silent, smoking, and the door bell chimed.

"I'll go," said Pauline, getting up.

"It it's Edna-Anne, tell her to come in," he smiled slightly. "Don't look confused. I phoned her after we came back from the lawyer's. I'm down, but not yet out." His grin broadened into a grimace.

IT WAS Edna-Anne. She came in timidly, almost afraid to smile. Richard stood up. "Come in, come in, Edna-Anne. Sit down and have a drink."

Edna-Anne looked as though she might collapse inside her drab linen dress. She was no how prepared for such a cordial welcome from Richard, and Pauline noted tears of happiness spring into the corners of her blue eyes.

She sat down and said, in her soft voice, "I'm awfully sorry, Richard—about your uncle not leaving you much money."

"How did you know?"

"Daddy told me."

"Daddy, Daddy," Richard imitated. "You're a big girl now, Edna-Anne. Call him Father or Alfred, or any old name—but *not* Daddy in that tone of voice. You sound like a three year old."

"I'm sorry, Richard."

"All right, all right. I just don't want my wife to sound like a moron with a father complex."

"Yes, Richard."

"And don't think he's going to run my life the way he did that other dope's who married you."

"I—I won't *let* him, Richard."

Pauline frowned at her cousin, tapping her foot impatiently. "A girl can love her father and her husband," she said. "You have no right to demand that Edna-Anne. . . ."

Edna-Anne whirled around to face Pauline. "If you don't mind, Pauline, I'd just as soon adhere to Richard's wishes."

"Yes, do shut up," added Richard.

"Well, excuse *me*," Pauline sighed, hugging her bosom and showing good-nature. "That's what I get for butting in."

"Come on, angel—" he turned his head away, saying the endearing word and grimaced at Pauline "—let's take in a movie."

To Pauline, Roff looked like some fair Adonis, out of the page of a book on mythology, standing there in the doorway, tall, broad, long, wavy blond hair, broad shoulders, narrow hips. He was all smiles.

"This is more like it, darling. Coming to see you at your home."

She took him into the sitting room, and they made themselves comfortable. Her heart was pounding with anxiety. What was his reaction going to be when he heard her story? How would his face look? Was she going to lose him tonight?

"I've asked you to come here tonight, Roff," she said, "because I want to make a clean breast of everything."

"It's not necessary," he smiled, holding her hand. "But if it will make you feel better—go ahead."

"I tried desperately to keep you out of it: away from me. When I first met you, the change began to take place. Suddenly, I was aware of how insignificant my struggle to compete in this man's world was—and realizing that change I had become firm in my desire to keep your name clear of scandal. Because I loved you so much, Roff."

HE DIDN'T say anything, but squeezed her hand.

"Then I changed again, so slow a change I hardly noticed it. I grew to realize that we *are* all inter-dependent upon one another and that when two people love each other . . ."

"That's right," he said.

Softly, "Roff, hear this, and if you just get up and walk out I won't blame you a bit. Please don't resort to any ideas of loyalty or manliness."

"Go ahead." A serious look came over his face.

"You know about Serena Chalmers, the missing English girl who stayed with me?"

"Uh-huh."

"I went to medical school with her in Germany. She was always fun-loving, pleasure-bent, with a strong adversity for work and study. We became friendly. I guess because we were such extreme opposites. Indeed, I guess I lived vicariously through her, reliving her romantic escapades. In return, I helped her study and for three years I managed to pull her through."

"Nothing terrible so far," he shrugged.

"One night I was feeling pretty low and I let Helena persuade me to go out with her. We drank a little. Serena started a flirtation with an Italian officer . . . and . . . Oh, the whole thing is so vague. Perhaps I was drunker than I thought. There was a fight and it turned into a riot. The police came and Serena and I were taken to jail. Also, that tavern had rooms upstairs and had a bad reputation."

"So?"

"Serena and I were expelled from the University?"

He looked dazed and she waited for what he would say. "But . . . ?" He shook his head, not being able to say it.

"I felt as though the world had ended for me. Becoming a doctor was my only interest in life and I had thrown it away by being tempted for one night. I went back to London with Serena and lived with her and her family. I didn't let Uncle Dudley know then that I had been expelled. This was in 1938."

Roff didn't say anything, but he had let go of her hand and had gotten up and walked over to the window. He stood there, looking out. Her heart sank, but she kept on with it.

"One night, Serena came to me. She was upset that she had caused me to be expelled and she had an idea. She knew a man, a Mr. Bunny Craig, who

was excellent at forgeries. She said he'd forge an honorable discharge from the University for me for a thousand dollars, and then I could go back to the States and continue."

Roff turned to her. "Pauline!"

"I was desperate. I took the chance to get my most prized possession: my desire to be a doctor. I wrote to Uncle Dudley, told him the truth, asked for the money. Rather than suffer the shame to his name, he sent me the money."

"Well . . ." Roff began.

"Wait, I'm not finished. Now comes the ironic part of the mess in my life," she said, stumbling on her words. "A week after Craig forged the document for me, I received a letter from the school. They had investigated the circumstances and felt that since my past record was excellent, and that it had been the first time I had ever done such a thing, and that since Serena Chalmers wouldn't be around to lead me on —they had voted to *accept* me back at school. I cried with joy, Roff. I got ready to leave."

A sigh escaped from Roff's lips and he even smiled. "Then everything is all right?"

"No . . . not quite. War was declared and I had to remain in England. Britain couldn't do much retaliation in those days, but they did bomb Germany in a token raid. Their equipment wasn't too good—and freak of all freaks—they bombed Heidelberg, mistaking it for a factory. The college, with all its records, was destroyed."

"But the letter? The letter they sent you?"

"I had lost it. In my excitement I didn't know what I had done with it. I had no alternative but to forget medicine as a career, or to come back to America with the forged honorable transfer. You know how I decided. I came back and finished at Columbia."

"Then Bunny Craig came, I see," said Roff.

"Yes. And he had the dishonorable discharge from the University. I could never, never prove that I *was* reinstated."

Roff scratched the back of his head and came over and sat down on the couch again. "This *is* a mess," he sighed.

She closed her eyes. "Go ahead. Walk out. I won't blame you."

"Don't be an idiot," he frowned. "I won't pretend I'm happy about it. We've got to find a solution."

"Now, do you see why I didn't want to involve you? That, plus what I thought about my father, plus all these murders. And now Bunny Craig being murdered? The police watch me. Dr. Cornell keeps checking on me. I'm the perfect suspect."

"Well," said Roff, "we can forget about it, of course. No one knows, no one could find out . . ."

"Or . . . ?"

"We could go to the authorities and lay the whole matter before them . . . and abide by their decision."

"Wha-what will they do to me, Roff?"

"I don't know. This is a screwy setup, all right. For the time being we'll say nothing. I'm going to fish around and see if I can find some court precedent in a similar case."

CHAPTER XXIII

ALEXANDER CORNELL sat at his desk, bending over and reading Serena's dream in his notebook. He frowned as he read: *"Suddenly I saw a man with a mustache and a beard, dressed in a black gown and he was angry at me. He chased me out of his house and the girl with the long red-hair went along with me."*

If, he thought to himself, the man with the beard and the long black gown is a symbol of the Dean of that medical school, and he is angry at Serena and chases her out of his house—a symbol for the medical school—and the girl with the long, red hair went along with Serena, then Pauline Setton was expelled at the same time Serena was.

"But," he said, out loud, looking around the empty office, "but Pauline Setton is a practising physician."

When he unraveled one knot, six more formed to take its place, and it annoyed him, annoyed him because he couldn't locate the one knot in the scheme of things that would cause the whole ball to fall apart. He closed his note book, picked up the phone and dialed the number of Bright's sanitarium. The nurse on duty connected him to Dr. Finell's room.

"How's the patient, Dr. Finell?"

"Fine. Just fine," Finell's smooth, cultured voice said.

"Any inquiries about her?"

"None at all, Dr. Cornell."

Then Lieutenant Soose hadn't checked on it yet. An idea occurred to him. The last place Soose would dream of to find Serena would be back in the office.

"Look, Dr. Finell. The family sort of regrets this action of putting Miss Adams in a sanitarium. They want her back. Tonight. Of course, you'll be paid for a full week."

"Ah, yes . . . of course."

"Will you tell Miss Adams to be ready? I will call for her in my car about two o'clock. Family doesn't want the neighborhood to see her," Cornell added. They agreed on it, then hung up.

He turned out the lights, lay down on the couch, and tried to grab an hour's sleep. It was eleven fifteen. But he slept fitfully. His mind jumped to Alfred Knight, who had confessed to the murders, but whom he had sent away with a smile and a great deal of respect. Knight had been willing to sacrifice his life for his daughter's happiness. Unless . . . was Knight being fiendishly subtle? Cornell pondered it, seriously.

Knight *could* have planned a campaign of murder, then thrown suspicion on his daughter, knowing it couldn't be proved against her. Then he could have confessed, aware that his confession wouldn't hold up—leaving both him and his daughter on pretty safe ground . . .

But why should he kill Craig, and in his, Cornell's office . . . ? To fight fire with fire, as Knight had told him he would?

The rattle of the venetian blinds stopped his thought. He turned his head to the window and he could see the window being slowly raised from the bottom. Cornell shook his head viciously to make sure he wasn't dreaming. He wasn't. He lay where he was, watching.

A HAND came in through the window, groped for the cord, found it, and slowly pulled the blind up. Then a tall figure edged in through the open window, came into the room, and began crossing the floor on tip-toes.

Cornell shouted, "Hey, you," and jumped up.

The man turned his head, then made a dash for the inside rooms. Cornell was on him, grabbing his jacket, and the man whirled and began flailing at Cornell with both fists.

"Richard!" Cornell gasped, wrapping his arms around him and effectively securing the larger man in his grasp.

"Where is she?" Richard said, hoarsely, drunkenly.

"Who?" He let go of Richard's arms and switched on the ceiling lights.

Richard's face was red, his eyes

glassy and he swayed unsteadily on his feet.

"Serena. You got her, damn you. *I know it!*"

Cornell sat down at his desk and pointed Richard to a seat. Richard ignored it and remained standing, holding on to the back of the easy chair for support.

"Explain yourself, Richard," said Cornell.

"Don't think I'm drunk," Richard shot out, with complex readiness.

"No matter. Why did you think Serena was here?"

"Things . . . things you told me." He pointed a finger at the psychiatrist. "Especially, that about the witchcraft. Only Serena knew that."

"Oh . . . ?" Cornell stopped and remained silent.

"God damn you," Richard snapped. "Serena's my wife." Then a look of amazement came over his face, and the back of his hand came up to his mouth, in a punishing slap. "I must be potted as all hell," he said. He walked around to the front of the chair and sank down into it. "Boy, am I a cluck!"

Cornell's reaction had been one of weary acceptance. Somehow, he thought, nothing ever again in this life would surprise him. That Serena was married to Richard Briggs had been an item he could never even surmise. And here it was, reality.

A slight, sheepish smile formed on Richard's handsome dark face. "I married her in London when I was stationed there with the Air Force . . ." he spoke slightly more sobered. "Pauline had given me her name and address and I looked her up. Snappy kid. Really snappy. I fell for her." He sounded anxious to explain, Cornell noticed. And anxious to be convincing.

"Then," Cornell said, "how in Heaven's name were you going to marry Edna-Anne?"

"I married Serena on the condition it would be kept secret. I didn't want Dudley to know about it. While I was there a bomb hit her home and since her whole family had been killed I thought Serena, too was gone. I let it go at that. I didn't know she had gotten amnesia and was in a hospital."

"When did you see her again?"

"When she came to visit Pauline, but really to see me. I almost keeled over, seeing her. Course, I didn't want Serena now."

"Of course," said Cornell. He was fighting desperately to hold all the facts in their proper places in his mind. He was trying to keep them from mixing together and become an untangable jigsaw puzzle. That he felt so terrible at Serena's being married, convinced him he felt more deeply for Serena than he had admitted to himself.

"I had it out with her,—and she agreed never to mention our marriage, and to consider ourselves never married at all. I told her if she did, I would deny it and denounce her as an impostor, who used her marriage to me to get into this country and get some of the Dudley fortune."

"And that kept her silent?"

"Yup. But she didn't care too much. I promised to help her out with money. Her aim was to stay here and grab off some husband for herself. She'd been seeing Dr. Edison a couple of times."

Cornell was silent, but Richard kept on talking.

"Hear about the old fraud, Dudley? Left me five grand and half the house. He gave away thousands to charities."

Cornell had to smile.

"Go ahead," said Richard. "Laugh. Everybody does. But I've taken up again with Edna-Anne."

"Forget it. I won't let you commit bigamy."

"Huh?" Richard sneered at him. "Listen, Voice: if you try to queer it I'll deny I was ever here tonight. Edna-Anne will swear to high heaven I was with her all the time. And I'll denounce Serena as an impostor."

CORNELL stood up and came around to the front of the desk. "No dice, Richard. Thing is, there's a marriage license in England. Serena can be identified by the London authorities. So make up your mind to it."

Richard stood up, swaying. He raised his fist to Cornell, said, "I'll break your . . ." swung with all his might. Cornell stepped back, and Richard went sprawling to the floor. He landed on his hands and knees. He started to get up, when he turned his head to look under the desk. His hand reached for something, then he got up.

He held a pearl earring between his thumb and forefinger, showed it to Cornell, then put it in his pocket.

He grinned wickedly. "I know Serena's earring when I see it," he said. "I sure enough know that I'm going to marry Edna-Anne, and you can't stop me." He kept grinning at Cornell as he walked to the door, then he went out.

SHE sat next to him, huddled in a blanket he always kept in the car. He drove slowly, despite the empty highway, to avoid being stopped by a motorcycle cop for any reason.

"Alex," she said, "it's all so unbelievable. I, a married woman. And to Richard Briggs. And for him to still want to marry Edna-Anna."

"Yes," he said, glancing over at her. Her head was turned, her honey-blonde hair hanging loosely along her cheeks, her eyes wide and searching his face.

"I don't care, Alex. I don't want to know about my past. I want to stay with you—always."

"You might," he said, "have to visit me at Sing-Sing."

"No, no. They'll never be able to prove that you killed Craig. Don't let them, Alex," she pleaded.

"I was thinking of you, Serena," he said bluntly. "You still had the best opportunity to kill Craig, when he was in the office today."

"No, there's nothing I can tell you to disprove that . . . If you have any faith in me at all, you'll reserve judgment until the others have been shown innocent. I don't know about my past, or whether I did kill Marion. But I do know I didn't leave your office to put the poison in the barium for Dudley Briggs, and I *do* know I didn't shoot Craig."

Cornell nodded. He pressed down harder on the accelerator as the car approached the Fifty-seventh Street exit of the highway.

"Let's go home, Serena, and get some sleep. Tomorrow we'll see what's to be done."

Thank God, he thought to himself, there was always tomorrow. For better or worse.

CHAPTER XXIV

SATURDAY morning broke cloudy and colder. Cornell found a parking space at Leonard Street for his car, then went up to see his former boss, the District Attorney.

The D.A. sat behind his large, highly-polished mahogany desk, and while he didn't intend to, Cornell knew, he gave off a terrific air of importance.

"Good morning, Alex," the D.A. said, eyeing him warily.

Cornell sat down.

"Chief, how would you like to get the shock of your life?"

The D.A. grunted. "Even if you did kill that English cockney I wouldn't be

surprised." He turned around with the swivel chair and looked out of the window.

"Have you found Serena Chalmers?"

"No."

"Well, you won't. Thing is, I have her in my office. She's been there ever since Monday night, when she came to me and took me to see the body of Marion Hillman in that playground."

The D.A. said softly, "where was she yesterday evening?"

"I took her up to a sanitarium, then brought her back late last night."

The D.A. looked at him, then got up and began to whistle aimlessly, his face getting white. He walked up and down the room, puffing on his cigar, making different expressions with his mouth. Then he dumped the cigar into the ashtray, whirled around to face Cornell and lost his temper:

"*You!* By damn, Alex, I would have forgiven you for killing Craig. But to keep that secret from me; with the whole damn force looking for this girl. By hell, you've overrun yourself this time, Alex. I'll personally bring charges against you. I'll personally prosecute you in court. I'll put my heart into it. I'll put my soul into it! I'll . . ."

That lasted for exactly seven minutes, as Cornell timed it on his wrist watch. He sat quietly in the chair and let the D.A. burn himself out. When the D.A.'s voice started to crack and he could yell no more, Cornell said:

"You sound mad."

The D.A. could do nothing but return to his seat and sink into it weakly, lighting a new cigar.

"The girl," said Cornell, "came to me with amnesia. She's still in that condition. She had a dream. From that dream I produced clues to her identity and tried to get clues to the murderer. I'm not finished. I've learned a lot, but not quite enough. I'm here telling you all this because I believe I'm within sight of the conclusion. One of her dream symbols was a Black Key—which means death to her for exposing the murderer of Marion Hillman, Dudley Briggs, and now Bunny Craig. When she produces the significance of the black key . . ."

The D.A. looked up, a new light of interest on his face.

". . . you'll have a complete case to bring to court," he finished, aware he sounded like a man giving away gold bricks.

"Alex," the D.A. sighed, shrugging his shoulders.

"I'm close now. But I need your support, your blessing—*and,* your promise to take me back. I rather liked my connection with this office."

"Hell, Alex . . . why didn't you come to me right from the beginning. I might've strung along with you."

"No. You'd have opposed it."

"Can you do it, Alex? Can you get this girl to reveal who the murderer is?"

"Yes, I can."

The D.A. slapped his palm on the desk, stood up, and said to Cornell:

"Go ahead, Alex. And God help you! It has got to be a complete case. Anything else and I promise you our friendship is at an end. Aside from which, you'll suffer the consequences of hiding a material witness, obstructing justice, and very definitely face a charge of murder for shooting Bunny Craig."

"Yes *sir,*" said Cornell, getting up and walking out.

HE NOTICED the change in Pauline Setton the moment he stepped into the living room. Her blue eyes were radiant, and alive, and the sallowness had gone out of her cheeks—or was it the rouge she used, now?

"Well," he said, regarding her, and accepting her invitation to sit down.

"You're quite a changed woman."

"Completely," she said, smiling, her large white teeth glistening.

"Roff?"

She nodded. "Last night, here in this house, I told him everything."

"Even," Cornell said slowly, "about being expelled from medical school with Serena Chalmers?"

"Oh . . . ?" her eyes narrowed at him. "Indeed, did Roff . . ."

"Certainly not. I haven't seen Roff. Then it is true?"

Rapidly, she told him the events that had led to her expulsion from the university, the connection with Bunny Craig, the reinstatement and finally the irony of the freak bombing of the university.

"Roff," she concluded, "says I can either forget about it, stop practicing medicine, or take my chances in confessing to the authorities. What would the penalty be if I tell, Dr. Cornell?"

He shrugged. "Search me. I've never heard of a similar case. I'll try to find out, though. But this is what Dudley and Marion knew?"

"Yes."

There was the sound of the front door closing with a bang and then Richard came in. His face was flushed, his hair mussed. He saw Cornell and came over.

His face was white, his eyes still red and bleary from yesterday's drinking session. "God damn," he muttered, "it happened."

"What?" Pauline almost whispered.

"Edna-Anne. She's been stabbed in the back."

"My God!" cried Pauline.

"And I found her," he choked on the words. "Lying on the kitchen floor. So much blood over and the kitchen knife sticking in her back."

"D-dead?" Cornell asked. Where had he slipped? What had he overlooked that permitted the murderer a chance to get at Edna-Anne?

"Not yet," Richard shook his head. His hands shook as he inhaled on the cigarette. "I came up to see her and just walked in because the door was half open. Her father was out for his usual morning walk in the park. I phoned for an ambulance. They took her to Washington Hospital . . . And then her father came in and almost went wild. He wanted to beat me up, the policemen held him back."

"Why you?" Pauline asked.

"He said I did it. He wasn't responsible, though." Richard passed a hand wearily over his face. He looked drawn and on the verge of collapse, it seemed to Cornell, and his face was badly in need of a shave.

"The ambulance doctor says he thinks the knife missed the heart, but that the left lung is involved. Her father is at the hospital now, giving his blood for a transfusion."

Nobody said anything and then Richard gritted his mouth. "She's got to live. She's just *got to!*"

"Like to go to the hospital with me?" Cornell said.

He nodded. "Uh-huh. I want to be there."

EDNA-ANNE was in a private room. Outside the door stood a uniformed policeman, and a man in plain clothes who was, probably, Cornell thought, a police stenographer.

"How is she?" Cornell asked the policeman, producing his wallet and credentials.

"Still unconscious."

"I'll take a peek."

The policeman let him and Richard pass through. Edna-Anne was lying flat on the bed, her face chalk white. A needle was inserted in the ante-cubital vein of her right arm, attached to a long tube which led up to a large glass jar

containing whole blood. The blood dripped down slowly.

On the other side of the bed sat Alfred Knight, holding and stroking his daughter's left hand. His face was almost as white as hers, and he sat there, crying softly, the tears running down his cheeks. For the moment, Cornell felt more pity for him than for the unconscious Edna-Anne. A nurse stood at the foot of the bed, watching.

Knight didn't look at either Richard or Cornell, but turned his head away.

"How is she?" Cornell asked the nurse.

She shook her head. "Not too good."

Richard stood like a mummy, looking at the plain, unattractive girl he had planned to make his wife.

"I'm . . . sorry," he said to Alfred Knight.

Knight didn't answer him.

Then Edna-Anne's eyelids began to flutter and everyone was silent, waiting. The nurse hurried to open the door, whispered to the policeman, then let him in with the police stenographer.

Edna-Anne's eyes opened, slowly. The first one she saw was Richard. She kept staring at him, trying to move her lips. Then, weakly, it came out:

"R-Richard . . ."

"Don't Edna-Anne. Don't try to talk. Save your strength," Richard said, coming closer to her.

She struggled for expression in a cracking voice. "R-Richard . . . I'm not going to . . . marry you," she said. "S—so tired of f-fighting for—happiness. No . . . happi-ness . . . w i t h . . . you."

Alfred Knight began to sob, his body racking.

"Edna-Anne," Cornell said, softly but firmly. *"Who stabbed you?"*

Her head didn't turn from Richard's direction and her eyes closed again. The nurse reached over and felt for her pulse.

"A little stronger," she said. "You'll all have to leave now."

CORNELL and Richard didn't speak to each other while leaving the hospital. Outside, in the street, Richard spoke first:

"Well, anyway she's got a fighting chance."

"Yes," said Cornell, blankly, "she has." There was in his mind, an odor. An odor he had smelled this past week. But he couldn't place it. It tormented him.

"And do you know, Voice," he said, sighing, "I wasn't too sorry she turned me down."

Cornell glanced up at him.

"Oh, I haven't changed my spots. I don't think so, anyway. It's just that I don't feel as badly losing her money as I thought I might have. Poor kid, I feel sorry for her."

Suddenly, Cornell turned on him and grabbed his arm. "Richard, for the love of God, if you stabbed Edna-Anne with the kitchen knife, *tell me now!"*

Richard frowned and pulled the hand off his arm.

"Cornell, you're crazy!"

Cornell s h o o k himself. "I guess you're right. If you did stab her, you certainly wouldn't tell me. If only I could get that odor . . ."

Richard sniffed the air. "What odor?"

Cornell shook his head. "Come on, I'll walk home with you."

Richard nodded and put something in Cornell's hand. It was Serena's pearl earring. "Here, I don't need it now."

Pauline and Roff were together in the library, sitting together, holding hands. Roff got up and shook hands with Cornell.

"I'm glad to see you again, Dr. Cor-

nell. Pauline told me you had discovered her—shall we say, one reckless night in London? How did you know?"

"From a dream," he said. He felt slightly unreal himself, standing there, an odor hammering at his brain, at his nose, and him not knowing what it was.

There was a hush in the room.

"Serena's dream," he said.

"But . . . but," Pauline said, "Serena's been missing. She hasn't been found.

Cornell didn't answer, staring past her, deep in thought.

"Nuts," said Richard, "he's not even listening."

NO ONE in the room pursued the subject of Serena's dream any further, and this Cornell did notice and take stock of.

"Well," Roff said, lightly, "we've decided what to do with Pauline."

"Mmmm?" Cornell looked at him, knowing what he had said, but looking askance anyway.

"I said we've decided what to do about Pauline."

"Oh . . . Yes, that would be best." The odor, the odor. He'd go mad if he didn't get it soon. What odor had he smelled in the past week that was trying to work its way back into his senses, to tell him something?

Pauline, Roff and Richard looked at each other and shrugged. Cornell caught it and said, "Sorry."

"As I see it," said Roff undaunted, "justice wouldn't be attained by going to the authorities. Many times, a body brought together to hand out justice must adhere to technicalities of the law, which isn't true justice. In this case, Pauline was *really* re-instated by the college; yet she was admitted to Columbia with a forged transfer. Hence, we've decided that Pauline is to stop the practice of medicine, and the matter is to be dropped."

"Yes," said Cornell, trying to concentrate. He managed to absorb the gist of Roff's speech. "Yes, I agree with that."

Pauline sighed, "I'm so happy. I never thought I'd see the day to be free of all my worries, of Bunny Craig . . ."

That did it! Cornell almost shouted as the odor he'd been trying to capture came through with definiteness. He felt as though an electric current had passed through him.

It was the odor of the burning pot roast!

CHAPTER XXV

IT WAS two o'clock when Cornell arrived back at his office. Serena was sitting, as usual, in the stuffed chair opposite the desk. She smiled at him as he came in and he grinned back.

"I'll fix two drinks for us," he said, walking on into the kitchen. "We'll need them."

He was back in a few minutes and he handed her a jigger of the Irish whiskey. He held his jigger up. "To the Black Key," he said. She looked puzzled, but drank with him. Then he took her glass, set it on the desk, and sat down in his swivel chair.

"Edna-Anne has been stabbed in the back," he said.

"No! Alex, when will it all end . . . ?"

"It has already. I know the meaning of the Black Key."

She remained silent.

"Are you up to another session?"

There was a new tone to her voice. "Why—if you *already* know the meaning of the Black Key?" She sat there, an immovable Dresden china doll, her face calm, the lips set, her eyes like cold steel.

"For one thing," he said, "I want to

tell you how you killed Marion Hillman, Dudley Briggs and Bunny Craig."

"Many times," she said softly, "so many times I sat in this very same chair, looking at you behind that very same desk. And I used to think to myself: Dr. Cornell is no fool. I ran away from him once because he was getting close, then came back because he was still safer than running around loose. He'll discover it finally, and then, Serena, what will you do? What will you do when the day comes that he knows you are not suffering from amnesia at all and that you are a murderess?"

"What did you decide?" Cornell was grimly amused.

"This." The gun materialized in her lap, so rapidly, it was as though it had always been there. It was his .38 pistol.

"You're a fool."

"I can try, can't I?"

"As a matter of fact," he shook his head, "you can't. You knew it from the beginning. You knew once the truth came out you were faced with certain execution. The Black Key. You knew there was no compromise. Edna-Anne is still alive. When she regains consciousness, she'll tell you were the one who stabbed her."

"I know. I phoned the hospital and I have plans for her . . . this afternoon."

Cornell said, "You purposely pot-roasted the left over bits of steak and then let it burn to cover up the odor of cordite in the room after you had shot Bunny Craig. You kept his body in the closet, waiting to get rid of it. Then to keep me from going to the closet you brought me my change of clothing."

She looked at him and smiled.

"Almost," he said with admiration. "Almost the perfect murder."

"Why, *thank* you," she mocked.

"I failed from the beginning, doubtless because I began to succumb to your attempts to make love to me. Had I really fallen for you it would have been the end. As it was, it retarded my progress enough to allow Edna-Anne to be stabbed."

"Love you," she rasped, her voice dripping acid. *"I hate you!* I despised you from the first moment I laid eyes on your irritating, smug face. How many times I wanted to scratch your eyes out."

CORNELL ignored the outburst and went on:

"The dream itself was a give away, had I not been too subjectively involved with you to miss it. You had worked out that dream laboriously, for months—but fortunately no one can really concoct a subconscious creation to perfection; there will *always* be something of the individual that seeps in. In London, you really had amnesia. You became acquainted with the technique of dreams and with psychiatrists and with the whole set-up."

"Really?" She moved her arms out, holding the gun, and half pointing it at him.

"No where in your dream do you have a symbol of your marriage to Richard Briggs. That *should* have been there had the dream been an authentic one. Then your dream was so perfectly concocted that every one is implicated in the murders, *everyone* given a motive. You give Dr. Edison, a decent physician, away as an abortionist; you squeal that Pauline was expelled from school with you; that Edna-Anne Knight wanted Richard, and so on. But you slipped when your mind created your prince charming in the clouds as being Richard—when you wanted it to be Dr. Edison. You slipped in indicating your jealousy of Edna-Anne, because if you were trying to point up Dr. Edison as your lover, why be jealous

of Edna-Anne?"

"You tell me," she said, dropping her arms, holding the gun on her lap again. She yawned.

"You began to show strain when I insisted Richard was your prince charming; it was then you realized you couldn't really keep out personal things from your dream. That day, you waited behind the door—incidentally, what did you use?"

"The rolling pin, in the kitchen," she smiled.

"Yes, of course. Well, you hid there and when I came in you hit me on the head, then built up the story of hearing some one else come in. You also slipped in pointing to Richard as the sender of the witchcraft picture to Dudley Briggs. You didn't want suspicion on him, because he was the motive for your murders. But your mind had him beating his face with his fist, indicating you had given him self-punishment because of the wrongs you felt he had done unto you."

"Richard admitted sending the picture." She yawned again, Cornell noticed with satisfaction.

"To cover up for you, knowing you had sent the picture. He couldn't tell me that you sent it without revealing his marriage to you."

She didn't move. The gun lay in her lap. "What else?"

"You slipped when you mentioned Roff's name. It was then, I think, that you were lost. My subconscious could never accept you, would always be suspicious of you. Of course, the ugly man in your fake dreams was yourself. That's why no matter which way you turned, you always kept seeing yourself."

"And my motive?"

"Richard Briggs. You married him in London, deeply in love with him—a love aided by the thought you had become an American citizen and could get over here. When you did come, you found that Richard didn't want you, that he threatened to denounce you as an impostor if you told about the marriage. You stayed on as Pauline's friend, having no intentions of giving Richard up. You plotted and planned and having a clever mind you came up with this amazing idea. You read my profile in a magazine, a medical journal Pauline must have had in the house. You selected me because I was near enough in the neighborhood and was unmarried. Then you set up intent by sending Dudley the witchcraft picture. How did Richard discover that?"

"He saw me making the doll. I didn't tell him what it was for and he didn't care. He knew after Dudley received the picture." She shrugged, "You know, Richard." Her eyes had closed slightly and she seemed to be trying to keep them open.

"Well," Cornell went on, "you had to commit two murders. Marion Hillman and Dudley Briggs. Marion because Richard was in love with her, even though he hated her later for deciding to marry Dudley—and Dudley, so that Richard could inherit the money and not have to marry Edna-Anne. Do you want me to continue?"

"Y-yes," she said and her voice was almost a whisper. Her head rocked forward, and she brought it back quickly.

"YOUR chance came when Marion went to a movie, two days after you knew that Dudley was going to Dr. Edison for x-rays. You took the key to Edison's office from Pauline's room; you took the envelope-opener from her desk, and a small portion of the barium chloride salts. The salts and the key went into your bosom, the knife into your pocketbook. You met

Marion coming out of the movies, suggested a walk, led her to the playground, and killed her, covering the leather-handled opener with a handkerchief. Then you got rid of the pocketbook in any number of safe places. Then you came to me and succeeded in getting me to keep you, as you knew you *would* succeed."

"Of course," she said weakly.

"On Tuesday night, when I went to the Psychoanalytic m e e t i n g, you slipped out, entered Dr. Edison's office, where you've been before, and put the poison in the barium sulfate container, and came back here. Perfect murder; perfect alibi. I never dreamed you'd have the nerve to leave here." He stopped and cleared his throat. Then:

"Bunny Craig came to you. Here was danger. He could upset all your plans, would expose you as being with Pauline at the forgery of the University transfer; that he would go around trying to collect blackmail from everybody, that, most of all, he knew where you were. You shot him with my gun, wiped it off and put it back in the drawer, planning to get rid of Craig's body at some time when I was out. Of course, our running away from that search warrant spoiled that for you. Then last night I told you about Richard being here and about his determination to marry Edna-Anne anyway. You went out this morning, knowing Alfred Knight took morning walks. She was glad to see you and in the kitchen you plunged the kitchen knife into her back and returned here."

Her lids were half closed. "Yes," she said.

"And so never will you escape the ugly man of your dream. You'll carry the image of him right to the electric chair."

"I . . . I'm going to shoot you . . . Alex."

He reached out for the phone. "I'm going to call the District Attorney to come and get you. You can't even lift the gun, Serena, because I've doped the drink I gave you." He started to dial the number.

Even then, even knowing, Cornell felt a rise of sympathy in him, as he watched her struggle to lift the gun, to keep her eyes open. She struggled and breathed heavily, then went all limp and her eyes closed.

She did look like an angel, sleeping in that chair, her honey blonde hair strewn against the back cushion, he thought.

Cornell spoke briefly to the District Attorney, then hung up. Then he reached for the classified telephone book and looked under the heading "Gymnasium."

He was really quite determined to take boxing lessons.

THE END

COUNT 'EM UP!

ONE of the most important and basic steps in classification of finger-prints is the accurate counting of ridges. No one can deny that this is a wearisome task when a large number of prints have to be classified.

Two technicians of Montevideo, Uruguay Police Department who were faced with this problem invented an electronic device which automatically counts the ridges on prints with infallible accuracy.

The two inventors of the unit are Mr. Nicolas Casatroja and Mr. Berta. As yet there are no known units of this kind in America, however it will be of great aid to finger print counters once a unit of this type is made available to the world over. —*Leo Smith.*

CORPSE ON TRIAL

ONE of the strangest trials on record occurred in a Chinese courtroom. A corpse was tried and convicted for smuggling. On August 6, 1888, the cadaver of a salt-smuggler, who was wounded in capture and died in prison, was brought before the criminal court in Shanghai.

The fact that the defendant could not acknowledge his guilt or innocence made no difference to that court, it seems, for he was condemned to be beheaded. This sentence was carried out by the proper officers at the place of execution outside the west gate of Shanghai.

. . . Ivan Basilovitch, a Muscovite prince, ordered an ambassador who neglected to remove his hat to have that hat nailed to his head. —*P. Boggs.*

Prescription for Death

By KEN KESSLER

People die in hospitals and nobody gets excited about it. Then what better place for a murder?

TONY SWANGER made the final tie, twisting the catgut adeptly with his slim fingers, and nodded at Max Padgett. Max signalled the nurses. Then, quietly, another anesthetically inert life was rolled from surgery. Another ruptured appendix was out in daylight where it could do no further harm.

Tony always felt good after an operation, especially an emergency. Snatching a life back did something to him. It wasn't like playing God, as some doctors who wanted to impress you would say. It was more like giving a kid a Christmas present or making somebody happy, maybe with a kind word. You just filled up inside.

Max was removing his mask. "Three hundred bucks. That's what you'd get for it in private practice. And maybe he's got a wife, and some kids. Later you'd get them."

"A hundred would suit me fine," said Tony, stripping off his surgical gown. "Sometimes they can't afford that much."

In his quick nervous step, Max strode to the door. "You're a sucker, Swanger. Me, I'm going to get mine. Save a life, save a bankroll." His red face was more solemn than usual. He meant what he was saying. "So add it up."

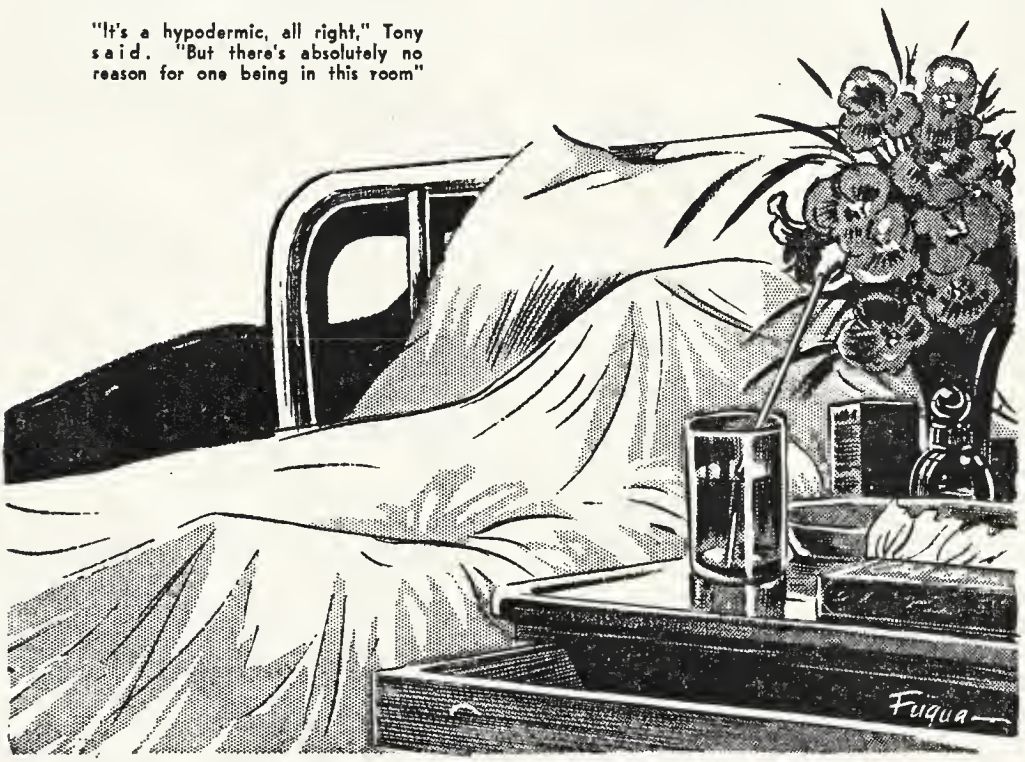
"It's always money, eh, Max?"

"Except right now"—he glanced at the clock—"it's my quitting time. I'll be seeing you." He went out of the door.

Alone, Tony smiled. Well, it took all kinds. Max had the makings of a good doctor but Tony pitied his patients. They'd pay, and plenty, and as often as Max could work them.

He drifted into the scrub room, peeled off his gloves, got out of the scrub suit and changed into his interne's uni-

"It's a hypodermic, all right," Tony said. "But there's absolutely no reason for one being in this room"



form and finally blew his nose lustily to clear out the ether. He put his thermometer in his pocket, first shining the black plastic case on his sleeve, and slipped his stethoscope around his neck.

As he was going out Joan was coming down the hall. "Hi, honey," she said, low, so nobody could hear her.

"Hi," said Tony.

Joan's nose wrinkled up. She looked both ways of the hall. "Gimme—quick!"

Tony aways felt self-conscious doing things like that in the hospital, but he kissed her anyway. Joan was so little he had to bend down. She had on lipstick, just a small amount, so he diverted to her cheek. And she had blue eyes and a figure that no uniform, however starched, could hide, so he looked at her a moment.

"Heard the latest?" said Joan. "Old money-bags what's-his-name died."

"John Needham?"

"Dr. Threlkeld said pulmonary embolus."

"Blood clot, hmm. But he was doing fine. I looked in before I came on duty, about four o'clock." He sighed as he always did when death struck. It made a doctor feel inadequate.

"I wonder how it feels to inherit a million dollars. His nephew Roger has been hanging around ever since the old man died."

Tony shook his head, absently. "Hernias can be bad about embolus. The patient comes along fine after the operation. Then they move a little or try to sit up and zingo!" He recalled that John Needham had acquired his hernia playing polo. "Remind me to stick to backgammon."

THE call light over surgery flashed red. Joan said, "For you. Well, I'll be seeing you, honey, and strode off. Tony went down the stairs, past the main floor receptionist who served dually as switchboard operator.

"Who wants me?" Tony asked.

"His Majesty," said Miss Pickwick, amusingly perturbed. "And, Tony—I mean, Dr. Swanger—he sounded awful mad. Said for you to drop whatever you were doing and come at once."

Tony said, "Thanks, Pick," and ambled down the hall, big and easy and graceful, a young doctor, his face firm, his blue eyes direct as if he expected opposition in the professional years ahead but was prepared for it.

He saw Roger Needham, nephew of the recently deceased oil tycoon, sitting back in the reception room, smoking. Tony guessed from his appearance he wasn't taking his uncle's death too hard.

He crossed to the lower wing and paused in front of the door marked *J. E. Tyson, M.D., Superintendent Tuler General Hospital.* He considered, trying to guess what was up, finally shrugged, and opened the door. Then he stopped quite still.

Dr. Tyson was sprawled behind his big, normally cluttered desk. He lay face down. A widening pool of blood threaded its way over the rug. However brief, there'd been a struggle. Books and papers, swept off his desk, were scattered on the floor.

Tony ran in, the door swinging closed behind him. He grasped the portly physician by the shoulder, turning him face up. A pair of dissecting scissors protruded from the epigastric region of his stomach. Tony clamped the stethescope to his ears and put the bell over Tyson's chest. No sound came back to him.

The sickening smell of ether hung like a mist over the room. Tony swiveled to the door, opened it—and almost bumped into Dr. Lee Threlkeld, the assistant superintendent.

Threlkeld was husky through the

body; his face, thin and sallow, seemed too small for him. His lips curved down. He wore a brown business suit. "What's the rush, Swanger?" he asked, frowning.

"Dr. Tyson. Somebody murdered him."

"Murdered?" Threlkeld brushed around Tony. After a glance, he said, "Call the police," and added, "Tell them no sirens. We want it hushed as much as possible."

Tony used the phone in the office, which went through the switchboard, and by the magic that was Miss Pickwick, word got around fast. Before the police arrived most of the staff was milling through the door. Joan came in, a trifle pale and Roger Needham, curious, mingled with the staff.

Captain Murdock and his retinue from Homicide arrived with nothing resembling quietude. "Who's in charge here?" Murdock wanted to know.

"I am now," Threlkeld spoke up, as if he'd just inherited the throne of Belgium. "I was on my way in to consult with Dr. Tyson regarding a private patient of mine, Mr. Needham. Dr. Swanger was just—leaving."

Although Dr. Threlkeld was attached to the hospital staff his was not, in the past at least, a full-time job. He maintained elaborate offices in an uptown building.

Tony hadn't thought Threlkeld believed he had anything to do with it. "He had sent for me," he protested.

CAPTAIN MURDOCK was a gun, a belt, and a tuft of red hair; he was that thin. Frequently, in his early interne days, Tony met him on ambulance runs. The captain openly boasted that there may be perfect murders but none of them occured in Tuler, Texas, and none would, as long as he headed homicide. Eventually, in every case, he arrested somebody, innocent or guilty. Murdock was building a name.

He asked now, "Any idea what he wanted?"

"He couldn't tell me," Tony said. "He was already dead." He mentioned the summons coming through the switchboard.

"Miss Pickwick. Is she here?"

Miss Pickwick stepped forward. "He didn't say what he wanted — he wouldn't to me. But he certainly sounded angry."

"Angry? About what?" He turned to Threlkeld. "You're the assistant. What might he have been angry about?"

Threlkeld shook his head. "He was an alert man, always going over the building. If he found something amiss he might have held Dr. Swanger, as senior interne, responsible. Outside of that, I wouldn't know."

"That isn't true," Joan said crisply, "I've heard Dr. Tyson say that Tony was the most brilliant interne ever to go through Tuler General. The others will back me up on that." A number of heads nodded.

Tony couldn't imagine at first and then he got quite a shock when Joan kept staring at his sleeve. He glanced down, instantly swinging his arm behind him. There was blood on his sleeve, gotten while he was turning the body but nonetheless awkward to explain.

One of the fingerprint men broke in, "No prints on the scissors. None at all. Wiped clean."

Captain Murdock didn't seem satisfied at all. Eventually he questioned each staff member individually, establishing where each was at the approximate time of the murder. He saved Max Padgett till last.

Max came sauntering down the hall from Interne's Quarters, dapper in a grey suit, quick and energetic in his

movements.

Captain Murdock said, "I understand you were on duty all day. Did you see anybody hanging around, anybody suspicious?"

Max frowned. "This has been a busy day for all us little men. When millionaires start dying, internes start jumping." He peered at Threlkeld. "Especially when the attending physician is absent."

"I came as soon as I was called," Threlkeld snapped. "Since when do internes question my whereabouts."

Max grinned and the others began breaking up, returning to their stations. All except Joan, who moved around behind Tony and kept herself between him and Murdock. Tony meantime kept one hand cupped over the bloody area. The medical examiner, the photographers and fingerprint men were packing up. Tyson's body was moved to a room.

Before leaving, Murdock came over. "You're a cool one, Swanger. The only trouble with being on the suspect list is that every slip counts." He wasn't smiling but his teeth showed. "You follow me?"

Tony said he did, shifting away from the boring eyes. Murdock's gaze slid down his big shoulders, caught and held momentarily on his crooked arm. Then he turned and went out.

Joan gasped. "Let me have that coat. I'll burn it in the incinerator." Tony peeled it off. Joan made a bundle and hurried away.

After that he felt pretty good. He couldn't blame Murdock, really, for suspecting him. A murder had been committed, and somebody had to be guilty, the surgical scissors pointing at somebody on the staff.

HE WAS going to the second floor when Dr. Threlkeld caught up with him. "As superintendent of the hospital," Threlkeld began, "I'm responsible for the entire staff. I'm sorry, but I may have to relieve you." "Relieve me? For what?"

Tony saw that he'd thought it all out. "Under the circumstances, suspicion can be as bad as guilt. I don't want to do it, Swanger. It could ruin your whole career. But—" he averted his eyes—"the hospital gets first consideration."

"You're just giving it to me easy that you won't sign my certificate of internship. I'm to finish next month. That's nine years' work completed. Now, even before anything is proved, you're ready to kick it all out."

"Irrespective of your side of it," Threlkeld said, his eyes flashing, "the stigma is bad." He wheeled around, leaving.

Joan came back. "What's big-ears upset about?"

"It isn't Threlkeld that's upset." He dropped his head. "Joan, it looks like all our big plans are tumbling down. The house, the maples in the yard and the poinsettias you wanted, are right now in the palm of Threlkeld's hand."

"That lug. He's never forgiven you for tripping him up on mis-diagnosing polio in the Candless baby. But Tony, you couldn't stand by and let him treat the child for a cold, when its whole future was at stake."

They walked to main floor reception. Tony leaned on the chart desk beneath the telephone. "I don't know. But unless I produce something, Murdock and Threlkeld together can give me a long ride." Absently he shuffled the papers on the desk, charts, memos, instructions.

"I burned the coat," Joan whispered. "I still don't see how they're going to prove anything."

Tony's thumb caught on a small slip

of paper. He turned it over. "Hmm, Max should see this." It was a deposit slip on the local bank, made out to one Perry Smith, for five thousand dollars. "There's a telephone number on the back." He grinned ruefully. "Maybe Max called the guy as a prospective patient."

Joan examined the slip. "Probably belongs to one of the patient's relatives. It's against rules but they sometimes slip calls through this phone."

They broke it up as Roger Needham, smoking nervously, came out of the main floor waiting room. Not over twenty-five, Needham looked forty. Deep black circles shadowed his eyes. By reputation he was quite a playboy and still further by reputation, he lived off an allowance granted him by his deceased uncle.

"Sorry to hear about Mr. Needham," Tony said.

"It was quite a blow." Roger Needham stamped out his cigarette on the polished floor. "I'm waiting for the undertaker from Marshall."

"Burying him there?"

Roger Needham nodded. "With the whole clan. Sort of traditional millionaire's row." He frowned. "Say, I'm sorry they horned you in on Tyson's death. I overheard the grilling." He attempted to smile; it didn't quite come off. "Wonder they didn't have their eye on me. I inherit something like two million from Uncle John."

Tony replaced the deposit slip on the desk. "If there was any tie-up," he said, "you'd have come in for a share." Joan had disappeared in Needham's room. She came out carrying some sheets. A buzzer sounded and Tony moved off. He was thinking of Roger Needham.

HE CHECKED on a diabetic in A-23. The patient had been discovered passed out on the street the previous day. Tony administered insulin and the response was uncanny. He drifted on down to the emergency appendectomy, a man whose name turned out to be Salter. "Pulse and breathing normal," the nurse informed him.

Then, on a hunch, he visited surgery. The room, deserted, was dark and still. He checked all through the case of instruments. The dissecting scissors was absent, but on consideration that meant little or nothing. Every staff member had access to surgery. Any one of them could have removed the scissors.

He rode the elevator down. Joan was waiting to come up. She was breathless. "I've been looking for you," she whispered. "Ssh." She looked around. "I've been removing the things from Needham's room. Tony, there's a needle prick on his arm."

Tony shrugged. "Nothing unusual about that. Perhaps Threlkeld ordered shots."

"But he didn't. That's the point. I looked at the chart." She tugged at his sleeve. "Come and look at it yourself."

Pending arrival of the mortician, Needham's body was still on the bed where he died. The body was completely covered with a sheet. "I found this," Joan said, holding up a 5cc syringe fitted with an 18-gauge needle. "That's why I looked. It was in the drawer of the bedside table."

Tony said, "Hmm," and examined the arm. The needle had been inserted in the cephalic vein at the bend in the arm, a region known as the anticubital fossa, opposite the elbow. It was almost undiscernible in the firm flesh. Needham, though past fifty, had been in fine physical shape.

"Let's see the chart," Tony murmured. Joan went out and returned with it. Tony scanned the form. "That's

funny." Then he looked up. His eyes were bright. "Joan, somebody gave him a syringe of air. He died of air embolus, a bubble in the heart."

"But why? Who?" Joan bit her lips. "Threlkeld says he wasn't here. Has anybody checked on that? And why would the syringe be in the drawer?"

"The killer heard somebody coming. Sounds as logical as any—"

The door opened. A stranger, dressed in black, entered. Behind him was Dr. Threlkeld and Roger Needham. Threlkeld observed Tony and Joan and his brow went up. "What brings you here, Swanger?"

Tony's gaze was level. "I was helping Miss Harrison make the body ready for removal."

"It's the living you're paid to attend," Threlkeld said heavily. "Not the dead."

Tony and Joan stepped out. Tony said, "Maybe, at last, we're making some progress." He Saw Max Padgett crossing the hall. "The only thing is, how do the two murders tie in?"

Joan wrinkled her nose. "They do though, I bet. It would be too coincidental, both happening the same afternoon." She paused, added, "Maybe Dr. Tyson got suspicious. You know how he was, always looking around."

"If he found the same thing we did, wouldn't he have called the police?" He shook his head. "Probably not though, on account of the scandal." Tony snapped his fingers. "In that case, Dr. Tyson didn't call me at all. The murderer did!"

"Why—what—?"

BUT Tony was heading for the switchboard. Miss Pickwick turned at his voice, startled. "When Dr. Tyson called for me, are you sure it was his voice? Did you notice anything peculiar about it?"

Pickwick jabbed a pencil against her lips. "I—I don't remember. Maybe it was a little muffled. Dr. Tyson always scared me—"

Joan had answered a call and Tony sauntered back past the chart desk, absently noting that Perry Smith had returned for his deposit slip, for it was gone. He saw the undertaker, with an assistant who had come in, wheeling Needham's body toward the exit. Then Roger Needham, looking relieved, strode out the front way. Threlkeld was nowhere around.

Tony was trying to think it through. In diagnosis he'd been taught to add up the little things, and he was doing just that. Still, if he was right, did he have proof?

He was interrupted by Miss Glass, superintendent of nurses. "Dr. Swanger, will you check temperature on the baby in A-11?" She smiled. "I've assigned three nurses but the child fights so, none of them can get it."

"Sure," said Tony. He reached for his thermometer case. His heart stood still!

The thermometer was gone! Numbness worked through him like a spinal injection. He knew, abruptly, where it was. In its damning black plastic case, he'd dropped the instrument while bending over Dr. Tyson's body.

If only he had mentioned moving the body, which eventually he might have done if the blood on his sleeve hadn't hit him so hard, the thermometer would mean nothing. As it was—

He was cold, sweating. He'd have to go back. Sliding from his pocket into the books and papers on the floor, the little black case had escaped the police. But what if they returned for another search, or what if the debris was cleaned up?

The lights fronting Dr. Tyson's office were extinguished. Tony eased past

the door, listening. Getting caught at this was about all Murdock would need.

He reached out, grasped the knob quickly, pivoting himself through the door. He was groping for the light switch when the first blow struck him. He put up his hands to guard his face, but the blows came ceaselessly. He lashed out, missed. This other man was breathing hard. Then came the final blow. It caught Tony's jaw. He felt himself slipping downward, downward. It was like that long last draught of ether. . . . .

THE lights were on. Dr. Threlkeld was sitting behind Tyson's desk, rubbing his knuckles "Sorry, Swanger," he said smoothly. "You see, I expected you. I was straightening up the office, preparatory to taking it over myself. Your thermometer case was under some papers."

Tony sat up. "But I—"

"You can explain to Murdock. He's on his way. If I was a little rough it was because I expected you to make a break."

As Tony rose heavy footfalls pounded down the hall. Captain Murdock was accompanied by two plainclothes detectives. Behind them was Max Padgett, a trifle pale, and Joan and several nurses.

Murdock said, "Sooner or later, one way or another, we flush 'em all."

Tony took a deep breath. One, then another. "Wait a minute." He breathed again. "No ether." He looked at Threlkeld and Murdock. "Do either of you smell ether?"

There was general sniffing and a shaking of heads in the negative. Suddenly, like fragments of an anatomy chart, the pieces fell in place. Little things, but a great number of them.

"When I found Dr. Tyson," Tony said, "ether was strong in here. At the time I supposed it was natural, never having noticed before. But this office is too far away, ether doesn't normally permeate to it."

"I presume," said Murdock, rocking back, "this is going to be good."

"It is. Dr. Threlkeld, if you had been giving your patient, John Needham, a shot, and you heard footsteps, a nurse or somebody, what would you do with the syringe?"

Threlkeld looked bewildered. "Why —I'd—it wouldn't be anybody's business."

"Think hard now. Say that you'd slipped away from your office and say the syringe was empty, injecting air."

"That's ridiculous!"

"Perhaps, but that's what killed Needham. Almost identical type death to pulmonary embolus. A sudden gasp, stiffening. But the person who did it was afraid. He decided against the risk of coming back, since most nurses would think nothing of a syringe being in a table drawer. It just happens that Joan is exceptionally alert."

Murdock said, "If this is some fantastic scheme to clear yourself—"

Tony's mouth was bitter. "It isn't, Murdock. You'll get your murderer." He looked at Joan. "Call Roger Needham. You'll find him at home, probably. He was too relieved at getting rid of his uncle's body to have accompanied it to Marshall. Ask him to hurry. Oh, and don't mention the police. Say there are some important papers for him to sign."

Max Padgett stepped back, easing toward the door. "Not you, Max," Tony said. He turned back to Murdock. "Dr. Tyson found the needle prick in Needham's arm. That was murder number one. He grew suspicious. He may even have spoken to the murderer about it. At any rate the murderer knew he was suspicious."

"If you're insinuating that I'm a murderer," Threlkeld began.

"I'm not. It's Max. And that's where the ether smell comes in. Max and I were in surgery. He slipped the scissors under his surgical gown. Under the pretext of it being his quitting time, he rushed out as soon as the operation was finished and came here. The ether clung to his clothes. He knew how squeamish Tyson was about scandal, was pretty sure he hadn't called the police, yet anyway.

"He killed him, then muffled his voice and called from this office to establish the fact that Tyson was then alive and, incidentally, to frame me. You added the little touch, Max, of being angry to give the cops something to work on."

He watched the interne sharply. Max forced a grin that didn't come off. "It won't take, Swanger. Go back to my motive for killing Needham."

A RUSTLING at the door announced Roger Needham and Joan, who'd waited at the door and rushed him in. "I thought you said—papers. What's this all about?"

Murdock shrugged. "Swanger's putting on a show. It's good, so far. Stick around. You're about to go on."

"Roger Needham and Max got together on a deal. Money means no more to Max than his vaso-motor system or his right arm. Max agreed to kill the old man, safely, for a cut of the money Roger was due to inherit."

"Quit slinging words," Max snapped. "You haven't proved anything."

"Then I will. Your greed, Max, led you to insist that Needham make an advance payment, five thousand dollars. The deposit slip was on the chart desk. The name was a phoney, of course. You used the phone and absently wrote a number on the slip, then walked out without it. After all, it wasn't important—I didn't know Perry Smith—or wouldn't have been except that I saw you come back and a little later the slip was gone."

Needham said, "That's very thin."

"The bank teller will be able to identify Perry Smith, or rather, Max Padgett. And a similar withdrawal should show on Needham's account. I'm sure he doesn't carry sums like that in his pocket."

Roger Needham sucked in his breath. He shivered visibly. Too much dissipation will cause that in a man, Tony knew. It eats into the nerves and then a sudden shock and adrenalin rushes through the blood stream, devouring the sugar. The victim shakes and quivers uncontrollably.

Needham broke for the door. He possibly would have made it except Dr. Threlkeld put out his foot. Needham sprawled. One of the officers grabbed him, while another clamped on Padgett.

"I didn't kill my uncle," Needham protested. "You can't pin it on me. It was his idea—"

"Keep right on talking, " Captain Murdock urged. "You may get as little as twenty years."

When it was over and the staff had returned to routine, Tony and Joan were alone for a moment. "But how did you ever associate the two murders, honey? Gee, for a minute I thought—well, I didn't know what to think."

"I didn't, really," Tony grinned. "Roger Needham did it for me. I was at the chart desk. We were talking about Murdock grilling me about Tyson's murder and Needham said, 'Wonder they didn't have their eye on me, I inherit something like two million from Uncle John.' There I was, holding the deposit slip in my hand. He didn't see it, or if he did, it didn't mean anything to him. So—it took me quite a

while but I finally put the two together."

It was quite a little while before Joan said, "I—guess I get it. Dr. Tyson was right, you're not exactly dumb, honey." She stood on her tiptoes, "Gimme. Nobody's looking."

Tony felt very foolish when Miss Pickwick, coming up the hall, started giggling.

THE IMPOSSIBLE ROBBERY

BY WAYNE HARRIS

MONTE CARLO is a fabulous, alluring name wbich stands for Chance. There, by tbe spin of a wbeel, tbe rich may become poor or the poor become ricb. An elaborate secret police system keeps constant watch on all who arrive at Monte Carlo. Since it attracts all sorts of people, great precautions have to be taken to prevent lucky gamblers from being robbed.

About 1905 tbis system was so perfect and silent tbat it was invisible and the world heard notbing of them. Once, for example, a man stopped on the grand staircase, put a revolver to his bead and pulled the trigger. Before the ecboes of tbe shot had died away, two members of the Surete (secret police) caugbt bim in their arms and rushed him into a room to the right of tbe stairs. No one, but tbose standing near the doors noticed that anything unusual bad bappened. Perbaps fifteen seconds bad gone by from the time the shot was fired to the complete disappearance of the suicide.

Anotber time two Italians arrived at Monte Carlo with a fancy system for robbing women in the gambling rooms of their jewelry. Two Surete men followed them to their hotel room from the train. In less tban ten minutes after tbeir arrival, tbey were arrested in tbeir room and taken to tbe frontier that same night, where two Italian detectives took charge of tbem.

Tbis was the most impossible place in the world for anyone to try to rob, yet tbat was just wbat Big Jim Cowley planned to do. The Surete first became suspicious of Cowley wben they found out his yacht, the *Mariposa* did not come from Massachusetts, as Cowley had stated; in fact no such boat came from the U.S. Suspicion numher 1: why should a rich American lie about where be came from?

At the Casino, as at any gambling place, everyone bad bis own system of bow to win, and it was a well-known custom for anyone to look over someone else's list of winning numbers. One Surete man walked over to Cowley, wbo was studying a small notebook, and looked over his shoulder. Witb a curse, Cowley pushed bim away, snapped sbut the book and walked away. But tbe man bad seen enougb to know wby Cowley was so anxious to bide tbe book. It was no system of numbers, but a carefully drawn plan of tbe gambling tables sbowing where tbe sliding metal covers to the cash boxes were located.

Even the secret police laugbed when they beard of the plan. Such a plot was mad. There were police at every door, bells under the feet of all tbe croupiers (the men who took the hets). In the bistory of tbe gambling rooms such a mad scheme had never been thougbt of. But they arranged to arrest the brother of the girl, alone. He promised to talk if they would protect bim.

He told them that Jim Cowley was wanted in Canada for a bank robbery. The 40 men be had witb him were all criminals posing as gentlemen of leisure. Cowley invited Doris and Frank to be guests on a trip to England where he and Doris would get married. But the *Mariposa* headed straight for Monte Carlo. Wben they discovered Cowley's plans they were terrified.

Cowley had plans of the Casino and the tables as well as of the vaults where reserve money was kept. Tbe plans were that Cowley's men (armed) were to enter the building in two's and three's and station themselves at tbe tables. 200 soldiers were stationed nearby as protection, but Cowley arranged for macbine-gun-armed cars to guard the only way they could come—a steep narrow road. When he gave the signal, the lights would go out and everyone would be lined up against the wall. Then, wbile the men rifled the tables and collected all the money and jewelry from tbe public, Cowley and some expert safe breakers would enter the vaults. It would all be over in a few minutes and the criminals were to escape in boats to tbe yacht and head for Greece.

Except for bringing Doris and her brotber into tbe plan, the mad scbeme might have succeeded. When Frank discovered the date and time of tbe plan, be notified the police by placing two bets—the first number was tbe date, tbe second was the time. Cowley planned his raid the very next night.

After dark, secret police were posted everywbere. When the cars witb macbine guns drove up, the drivers were bound and gagged before tbey knew wbat was bappening to tbem and the policemen took their place. Cowley's men arrived one by one. Each was immediately disarmed and bandcuffed. Cowley himself must have heen watching, however, because he rushed back to his yacht. Then began a wild pursuit—but Big Jim's boat was too fast and the nigbt too black, for no one to this day has solved tbe mystery of Cowley's escape.

Frank and Doris were safely returned to New York and were given handsome presents from the Casino for saving it from the great scandal and loss which they bad so bravely prevented.

There was a growing feeling of strain in the room as he sat there and very calmly viewed each banknote through the glass

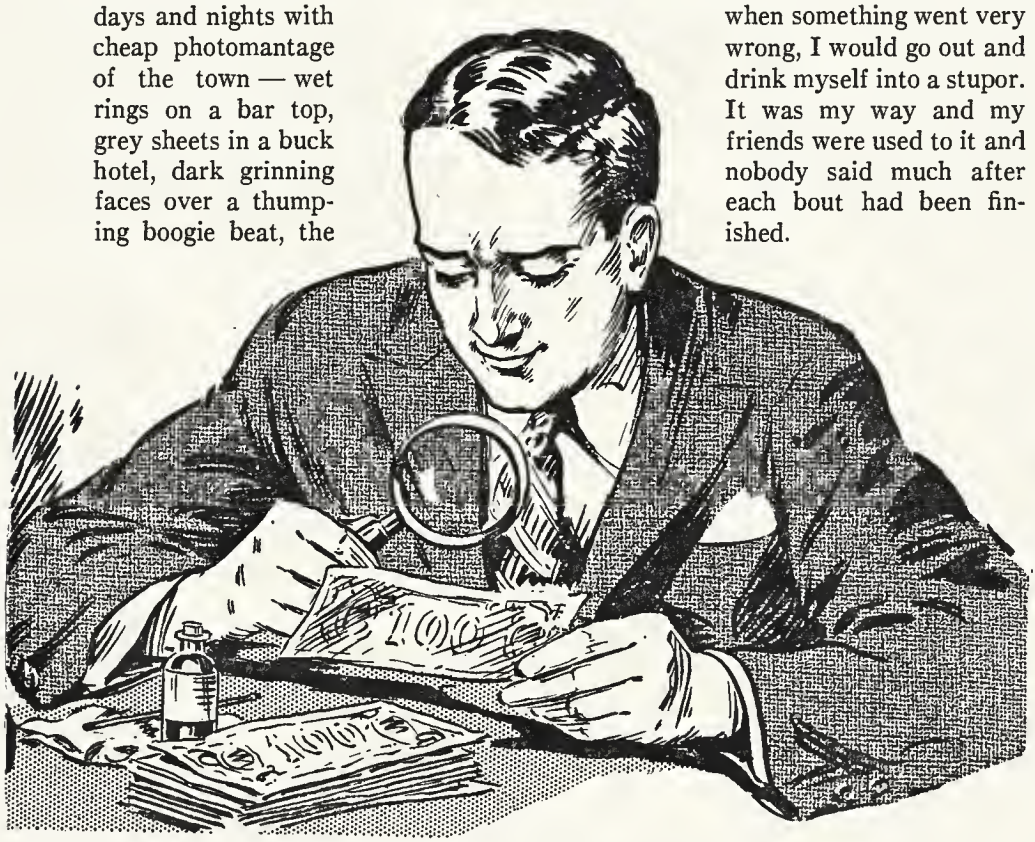
Get Dressed for Death

By John D. MacDonald

To pull this job, they must have a fall guy. What could better suit their purpose than a drunken ex-cop?

THE world had been whirling—full of too-loud music and the acid rasp of cheap liquor. But I couldn't pin it all down. I knew something had gone wrong. Something big. So big that I couldn't let myself think about it. So I filled the days and nights with cheap photomantage of the town — wet rings on a bar top, grey sheets in a buck hotel, dark grinning faces over a thumping boogie beat, the tired white flesh of a too-old cigaret girl, the prostitute grin of a chiseling waiter. Oh, I forgot whatever it was. I did a swell job. I nearly forgot my own name.

Not that I made a habit of doing this kind of thing. But once in a while, when something went very wrong, I would go out and drink myself into a stupor. It was my way and my friends were used to it and nobody said much after each bout had been finished.



Then there were new impressions. A scorched patch on the tip of my tongue from scalding coffee. The drenching chill of a needle shower. A repeated ringing crash as a heavy hand slapped my face with blinding monotony. The mad dancing world began to slow down. It ran slower and slower and then stopped moving entirely. My eyes felt as though the lids were cracked like alkali lips. I peered out into the suddenly silent world and saw a square heavy face hanging in the murk, dark sad eyes staring into my own.

My head thumped and I shut my eyes. I smelled the stench of alcohol and old perspiration rising from my unwashed body. Under my crusted clothes my skin felt baked out—dry as a dusty road in summer. I opened my eyes again and big-head was still there. He had grown a body. A big round heavy body. He was about twice my size and better than twice as sober, from the look of him.

In spite of the bitter taste in my mouth, and a tongue so swollen that it seemed to catch in my teeth, I heard my own hoarse voice say, "Where am I? What do you want?"

His voice had bell tones. It rang deeply at me. " Finally, hah? Finally you come out of it!" Such a stew like I never seen. You could have died with it."

But he had done it. While I was trying to make sense out of his words I suddenly remembered what had happened on Tuesday noon—remembered the polite smile of Cowsie, the chief, as he had shaken my hand. "Now don't take it too hard, Don," he had said, "Lots of guys find out they will never make a good policeman. You're lucky to have found it out so early. You might have spent years on the force without getting anywhere. And with your education that would have been close to tragic. It's not that you're unintelligent. Its something hard to describe. You feel too deeply the causes that make a criminal. You have too much compassion in you. We don't want bitter, cruel men on the force. But on the other hand we don't want men who are too sensitive. You better find another line of work. I know that somewhere there is a big chunk of success waiting for you—and someday you'll thank me for this."

I remembered sitting in the park staring across at the lake trying to think of some other line of work. There wasn't any other line that I wanted. I know it sounds silly, but there are people who have to be cops, just like some people have to play drums, and others have to carve open their neighbors. For four years I had seen myself as a brilliant homicide man serving out his apprenticeship in obscurity. And then the awakening. I had walked across the park and found a small bar, a place full of blue leather and hammered copper. The round sour barman had made me drink after drink . . .

"What day is it?" I asked big-head.

"Saturday. Three in the morning. This is a back room on the third floor of a place six miles outside the town. Wally Williams' place. I'm Bus Gerchen. Wally told me to sober you up. He wants to talk. You better go take another shower. Take your clothes off this time."

He had to repeat it twice before my sodden brain would take it all in. I remembered hearing about Walter Williams, a man who had started to grow fast a few years ago. Apartment houses, bars, road stands and rumors of other lines more profitable. I had never met him. I had wondered about him.

I rammed into the door frame when I tried to walk into the bathroom. I bounced off and nearly fell into the old

fashioned tub. It was a big bathroom. Looked like a house that had been remodled. The light was already on. I squinted at myself in the mirror and for a crazy second thought that it was someone else looking at me through a window—torn stained collar, necktie gone, quarter inch of stubble on my long hollow cheeks and skin the color of a mouldy cream pie. I shuddered and stripped off my clothes. Every few seconds I had to stop and wait for a fit of the shakes to run its course. They were so bad that I couldn't undo the buttons and shake at the same time. I ran it as hot as I could stand it, and gradually shifted it to cold. I could almost feel the liquor poison running out of me. It left my knees shaking from weakness. I wondered how long it had been since I had eaten.

I CLIMBED out from behind the curtain and found a shaving set on the edge of the sink. It looked well-used, but clean. I had to lean against the sink hard to keep from shaking while I shaved. Even so, I dug out a few little gouges. There was a comb in the cabinet. When I was through, I looked the picture over. I had a little more color, but the big dark rings were still under my eyes. I could have folded right up on the floor and gone to sleep like a country cat.

I hated the thought of getting back into my clothes. I didn't want to even have to touch them again. So I stuck my head into the bedroom and saw bighead sitting there, a gleaming white cigarette tucked into his dark face. He anticipated my question and motioned at the bed. There was a robe on the bed —dark red and frayed, but clean. I slipped it on and sat dizzily on the edge of the bed.

"I told Wally you'd be through in a few minutes. He's in the game room. He'll be in. You just sit quiet, only don't lay down. I don't want to have to slap you some more. By the way; I'm supposed to make you feel like this was home. So I'm calling you Donny, see? Okay?"

"I like Don better, Bus. But call me anything you want to. I'm in no mood to object. I feel terrible."

"You sure ought to, Donny! You sure ought to! What a load!"

"Let's forget it, hey?"

"Sure, Donny. We'll forget it."

At that point, the door swung open and a brisk little man in pale grey gabardine came bustling in, smiling and rubbing his hands together so hard that you could hear the husky whispering noise they made. He looked like a prosperous car dealer from Sioux City, an ardent Rotarian, Elk, Moose and what have you. He looked like he could make with the smoking car story or the collection plate with equal aplomb . . . just one of those little grey headed, well-washed guys that you see in convention pictures wearing a paper hat, a blonde and a big grin. A hick in the city. Like a chump I figured him for one of those double motivation birds, a guy with but two overpowering desires—one to be a pillar of the community, and two to be one of the boys. I should have known better. But I was pretty hung over, remember.

Big Bus lumbered up out of his chair, and with sort of a reflex motion, I wavered to my feet.

"This is Mr. Williams, Donny. He owns the place," Bus said. Then, turning to Walter Williams, "Guess he's okay now, boss. Don't look so healthy, but he's pretty stringy and tough from the looks of him. Not so feeble as you might think."

I resented the Donny, and the tone of voice. But I didn't have time to object. Little Williams stuck his hand out at me

and gave me the Rotarian grin, "I'm delighted to meet you, Mr. Robinson. Please sit down." I was glad to. He had pumped my hand so hard that he had started up the headache again.

"Now, Robinson, I've got people in the game room, so I won't waste your time or mine. You come to work for me today and you get your keep, food and room that is, plus two hundred a month until I decide either you are worth more or nothing. I'm running a big business and I like it run efficiently. Is it yes or no?"

Maybe my ideals got in the way. It's a big jump from being on the cops all the way down to being another handy boy for a guy close to the rackets if not in them. So I blazed up and said, "Just who the hell do you think . . ."

Bus had moved so quickly that I didn't even see his big hand before it hit me. After it hit me, I didn't see anything. He must have caught me across the ear with it and slapped me off the bed. It felt like I had fallen through a ferris wheel. The fireworks faded as I pushed myself up off the rug. It was one of the toughest pushups I ever did. In my condition, all my fight had leaked out when that big mitt whacked me. I set myself tenderly back on the edge of the bed. I looked at Bus. He looked embarrassed.

"There really isn't much choice, Robinson. Either you take the job, or I'll have Buster go over you thoroughly before we throw you out onto the highway. I know you lost your position the other day. I also know you have no other job. Now we've taken a lot of trouble over you, and I don't mean to see it wasted. Maybe you can relax if I tell you that I want you to work for me as a detective. I want certain people traced and certain people followed. I want some papers recovered and I want proof against one of my croupiers. But I can instruct you later. What do you say?"

What could I say? I said okay. I was in like Flynn. Up to the shell pink ears. Or at least until I got my first chance to leave the place. And I think Williams read my intention in my eyes. He must have. Otherwise . . .

Anyway he grinned again, shook my hand, turned quickly and walked out. Bus said, "Geez, Donny! I'm sorry I had to do that, but you know how it is. I got standing orders to chop anybody that tries to talk rough to Wally. He don't like it. You know how it is?" He was so anxious to make up that I had to grin at him. He grinned back and went after some more coffee. He had to wake me up to drink it. I was out like a Republican.

I WOKE up with a head like a rotting cyprus stump, and a mouth like old swamp water. But I could see out of my eyes. For that I was grateful. I couldn't find any clothes, and the great outdoors looked like late afternoon. So I climbed back in and went to sleep again before I had a chance to get hungry. . . .

Somewhere near at hand were scrambled eggs, toast, coffee and the rattle of a newspaper. I jumped up, or rather I sat up slowly. Big Bus smiled showing a couple of rows of piano keys, and handed me the paper.

I said the usual morning greetings, tossed the paper aside and lit into the breakfast which was on a card table near the bed. Bus watched me eat with the amused tolerance of the big man for the appetite of the not-so-big-man. But I did pretty well. About forty seconds flat. Then I picked up the paper while I sipped the coffee. I read one of the front page items with interest. My little red-cheeked chums on the force would be jumping around—at least some of them. A nice little blonde dish

with a hole in the head tossed out of a car on a main route out of town. Lots of excitement. I felt a pang of envy, and then realized that even had I been back on the force, I wouldn't have been cut a slice of that cake. That was juicy enough for the topside.

"You sure got around last night, Donny," the big man said, and I glanced up into his quiet sad eyes.

"Around? How? I didn't know I could even move."

"Well, Geez, Donny, you must have been able to move to knock off that little blondie named Thirty Thurston and dump her out of your heap and get back here to go to bed. That's moving, boy!"

As I felt my mouth drop open, I knew with horrified certainty that big Bus wasn't out of his head. Something about the way friend Wally had looked at me just before he left . . .

"Sure, Donny. You remember. Wally has got a little thirty-two gun with some prints of the tips of your fingers on every shell left in the clip. You only used two on poor little Thirty. Also he has got her cigarette case with some prints of yours on it, and also he says for me to show you this. He's got the negative."

He slipped a big picture out of the side pocket of his jacket and poked it into my hand. I held it up. There was a little blonde on the floor, a black smear among the light curls. Her face was toward the camera. A figure sat on the edge of the bed. Me! I was looking down at the floor, at a gun sagging from my fingers. The posture was stiff, and I knew that somehow they had balanced me there. But who else would ever believe it? I suddenly felt cold, the cold of the pole and outer space. And suddenly I hated Wally Williams . . . hated him with all my heart, with all the pent up frustration and disappointment of the past few days. His plan held me as tightly as the jaws of a trap.

I didn't see him for two days. I stayed in the room for two days. Bus told me to stay and I stayed. I couldn't think of any way out of it. I knew that the brisk little Wally would never have the negative where I could get hold of it. After two days he told me where the evidence was hidden. It was in a wooden box at an unnamed storage company. The storage receipt was in an envelope. The envelope was with an unnamed law firm. It was to be sent to the police along with a sealed letter if he, Williams, were to die suddenly. He grinned at me, a foxy little grin, and I stifled an impulse to smash it back into his teeth.

"But look, Williams! It doesn't make sense. Why so much trouble over me, a busted cop? What have I got? Nothing."

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I dropped onto the bed and smoked and looked out at the country landscape. Somehow the sight of green grass and leafy trees didn't fit into the spot where I was. I felt as though I should be looking out onto a bare grey alley, or a blank brick wall. Or the corridor of a prison. I smoked and thought of the chain of proof. The picture. The prints.

It was hard to make the time pass. Bus helped out as much as he could.

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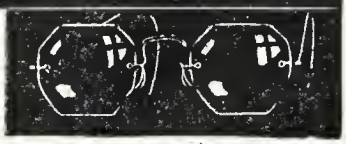

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We even got down to Indian wrestling, but in addition to the fact that he was bigger and stronger, my left-handedness put me at an additional disadvantage. Then I made him do it left handed and came much closer to knocking him off balance.

We ran out of conversation and games. He was a big, good-natured guy—sort of childlike. But down inside him somewhere there was a strong strain of cruel power. I saw it glow in his eyes once or twice. It frightened me a little. I wondered if possibly he was a little mad. In his business, it would have been an advantage.

Also, I was bothered by a twist in my own mind. I had the feeling that there was something that I had discovered that would loosen the jaws of the William's trap a little. It had come over me after I had seen Bus rolling fingerprints onto the polished side of his cigarette lighter. He had admitted that he had had experience taking prints, but when I tried to trap him into admitting that he had put my prints onto the cartridge cases and onto the cigaret case, he just grinned at me and said, "Geez, you talk silly sometimes, Donny! Now why should I go and do anything like that, hey?"

But still I had the idea that there was something I should know—and couldn't think of.

ON FRIDAY, one week and three days after Cowsie had fired me, Wally Williams came to my room. "Well, Robinson," he said, rubbing his hands, "the time for action has nearly arrived. Bus here, has your clothes." For the first time I noticed that Bus was carrying the familiar blue uniform over his arm. A duplicate of the one I had shed in the locker room after talking with Cowsie. Just to look at it made me feel bad.

"What can I do with that?" I asked stupidly.

"Wear it, of course. Now, you know Henry C. Rathburd, don't you, Robinson?"

I nodded. I knew Henry. A dear friend of my father's right up to the time of Dad's death. President of the First Citizen's National Bank. A big gruff guy. A right guy. A flock of white hair and a permanent tan.

"Well, you and I are going to call on Mr. Rathburd. You will wear the uniform. I am going to be a currency expert from Washington. There will be another man along with us. A Mr. Cowsie, or should I say Chief Cowsie? We will call tomorrow just an hour after Mr. Rathburd's bank receives a particularly large shipment of currency. Cowsie will ask to see samples, I will examine them while you stand by. You and Cowsie will be sufficient evidence to Rathburd that I am what I pretend to be. I will declare that there has been a switch in transit. I will request that we take the currency away with us. Rathburd will agree. Cowsie and I will give him receipts. Bus will be in a high window across the street with a good rifle. Just in case. You and I and Cowsie will carry it out to the official squad car. You will drive. We will tell you what to do next."

"But that's . . . that's . . ." I didn't know what word to use.

"You may call it bank robbery, my boy. Riskless bank robbery. We just walk in and carry it out with everybody's blessing. One million, one hundred thousand dollars worth of very fine cash in bills that are not too large. Isn't it excellent?"

I had to admit that it was. I could see why they had gone to such pains to sew me up. It was worth it. My pride jumped back up to norm as I suddenly realized that the crooked Cowsie had fired me not because I was incompetent, but because my father had been a good friend of Rathburd. But what could I do but play along? If I didn't, the

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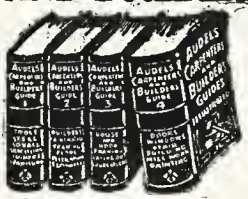

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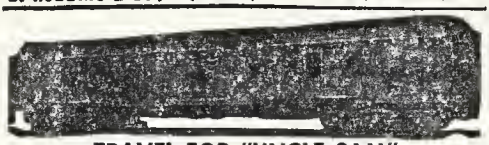

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death of Thirty would catch up with me far too quickly. And yet there was something that I should remember. . . .

I walked down the stairs between Bus and Williams and got into the squad car. Cowsie nodded at me, his aristocratic face pale and drawn. His mouth looked tight, as though he were biting the insides of his lips. I sat in the back with Bus. He was also silent. The .38 Special, loaded with blanks, hung heavy on my left hip. Cowsie swung the car expertly through the heavy traffic as we neared the city. No one spoke. I knew that the plan would work. I felt as though I were riding in a dream. I didn't see how it could be true. And yet it was. With the many hours of grace that the plan would give them, there would be time to cross a nearby border. And if they had a plane lined up . . .

Cowsie slid smoothly up in front of the bank. Bus ducked out the rear door and headed across the street toward an office building. I knew that in a matter of seconds the waiting rifle would be cradled against his shoulder . . . the sad dark eyes peering down the shining barrel into the dim interior of the bank. As we stepped out onto the sidewalk, Williams shot one hot glance up at me out of his light blue eyes, and tapped a small bulge in his jacket pocket. I understood. We walked into the bank.

I felt stiff and self conscious. They let us into Rathburd's office, and it hurt me to have the big kind man come forward, his hand outstretched and say, "Don, boy! Why don't you stop in oftener? It's good to see you!"

I couldn't respond to his friendliness. He looked a little hurt when I dropped his hand as quickly as I could and introduced my two companions. He already knew Cowsie. The quietly dressed, sedate Williams had become Mr. Loring Bessinger, of the Treasury

Department, with sheafs of identification. Williams played it well.

Rathburg got very upset when he heard of the possibility of his shipment being counterfeit. He hurriedly sent for samples. Williams sat down at the edge of the desk and inspected them through a small glass. Then he took out a bottle of chemical of some sort and daubed a little on the back of a bill, rubbed it off and then looked again through his glass. "Bring more samples," he snapped.

RATHBURG hurried outside and came back in a few moments with some more bills. Williams went through the same procedure. Then he looked up at the tall Rathburd. "I'm sorry, sir, but this entire lot is counterfeit. I'll have to take it all back with me. We'll give you receipts. Please have it packed immediately."

Rathburd was efficient. In five minutes two bank guards had lugged two big canvas sacks to the door of the office. Williams and Cowsie both signed the receipts. I looked on. I could think of nothing to do or say that would stop the plan. I felt like a stuffed uniform.

Cowsie went ahead with the cash toward the car while Williams packed up his equipment. Rathburd asked idly, "I suppose you worked on the Sander's case last year, Mr. Bessinger."

Williams looked up and said, "Certainly! Why?"

"Because Don here is acting funny, and I just made up the name of Sander's to see what you'd say. I never saw anybody examine money that way. And I never heard of a shipment of counterfeit from the reserve bank." As he spoke he moved with surprising speed toward his big desk. I knew with certainty that once he reached it, an alarm would resound through the bank—and

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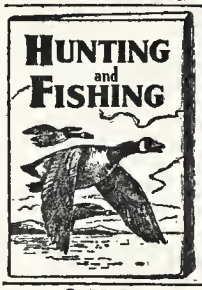

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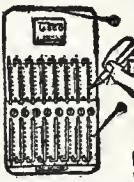

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I would be caught like the others.

But there was a muffled crack from the half-crouched Williams and a bloody hole appeared miraculously where Henry Rathburd's eye had been. The big man fell heavily across his own desk and rolled off onto the floor. He was dead before his body stopped moving. I still stood stupidly, caught in the bright blue glare from Williams small eyes. He had stopped looking like a small town business man. He looked like a different sort of creature. A thing that would kill quickly and without warning. He motioned me out of the office. I walked out and heard him shut the door quietly behind him. Apparently the shot, a small calibre, muffled by the fabric of his jacket, had gone unnoticed.

Just to my left was an old man in a bank uniform. I recognized him as John Fellows, a man I had known since the days when I had come into the bank to look at him. He had been younger then. I remembered the time, after hours, when he had showed me his gun. That had been a big day.

As I passed John, I snatched the big gun out of the worn holster and threw myself against him. By luck it came free. As I rolled across the floor I heard another crack and felt a stinging in my leg. I twisted on the floor and brought the gun and my eyes to bear on the spot where Williams should have run to. He was there. He was looking back at me, his lips twisted, the gun out of his pocket and gleaming in his hand. A hundred bells started to clang. The big revolver jumped in my hand, and the crash of the bullet knocked Williams off his feet. As he fell I could see from the angle of his head that it had caught him in the throat. I knew from the spreading smear of blood on the marble floor that another bullet wasn't needed.

I jumped up and tried to run. The

little slug from Williams' pistol had done more damage than I thought. My leg folded under me just as something smacked viciously into the floor. I remembered Bus. I could almost hear him saying as he pulled the trigger, "Geez, Donny, I'm sorry. But that's what he told me to do if you pulled anything funny."

I crouched behind the row of teller's cages, and found that by stepping gently I could move. I moved fast. But I was too late. The car was pulling away. My blue uniform kept any of the other bank guards from shooting at me. It was luck that neither of the other two had seen me take John's gun. I stood on the sidewalk, held the revolver as steadily as I could, and sent five of the big .44 slugs crashing after the sedan. There was no effect. Then a sledge caught me on the shoulder and drove me into the sidewalk. As I lay with my cheek against the warm cement, I was looking toward where the white sedan was pulling around a corner. As a film dimmed my eyes it looked almost as if the white car had veered across the road . . .

There was a sharp smell of antiseptic, but it would fade and I would dive down into black velvet again. And once there was a tube in my arm. And a soft cool hand on my forehead. And the blackness again. It was deep and seemed eternal. I wanted so badly to rest but they wouldn't let me. The wouldn't let me . . .

The mists cleared and the sun was shining on the glistening oversized face of a man with the sharp cheery look of an Iowa boar. He kept fading and reappearing and fading again. And I made out some of the words. I recognized him as the Commissioner. ". . . reinstated . . . confession by Cowsie . . . plane in Canada . . . your last shot severed the left tie rod . . . car out of control . . ."

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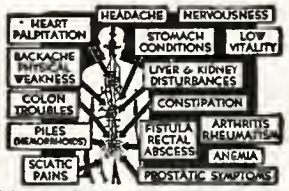

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Somewhere I knew dimly that Williams was dead—that the letter would get to the force. Then I remembered. It was so silly to have been unable to think while I was well, and then to remember through the hospital mists. The wrong hand. The wrong prints.

I heard my own voice from some distant closet saying, ". . . the girl. Murdered. My picture. Wrong hand."

More fadeout, and then the blessed words, "Of course, Robinson. In the picture the gun was in your right hand. The fingertip prints we found were taken from the right hand. The print on the case was a rolled print, not a natural one. Do you think the department is that stupid? You're in the clear. But it's lucky for you that you are left handed."

I tried to speak again, but white starched sleeves appeared and the red faced man was led away, and there was a man in white, smiling, with his finger on his lips. As I faded away again I was thinking, "Cowsie! A cop who went crooked. One stinker out of a thousand. And I'm back in. And I'll do the kind of a job he should have done."

THE END

TALKED TO DEATH

IF THE weather is hot and your temper high, hetter think twice before starting a fight. The result might be as disastrous as it was for two irate gentlemen in Pennsylvania Station, New York City, some time ago.

It was one of the warmest days of the summer when the two men angrily and loudly began an argument in the waiting room of the station. A large crowd gathered and a policeman approached to quiet them. Though they did not actually hit one another there was much fist-waving and loud arguing.

Suddenly, one of them let out a frightened gasp and fell to the floor. He died immediately of a heart attack. A minute later the policeman rushed to the second man, who had collapsed nearby. Almost instantly he, too, died. He had had an apoplectic stroke.

Oddly enough, not one blow had fallen in the argument, and angry words alone had taken two victims. —*June Lurie*

THE CONTRABANDISTA

By ROSETTA LIVINGSTON

DURING the 1890's the border towns in Spain did a flourishing business in smuggling goods across the border from France. It was a dangerous and exciting game and many Spaniards were in it as much for the thrill as for the money. The smugglers all had homes and trades which they operated by day as a cover. The business of smuggling was such that it could only be carried on under cover of darkness.

Señor Lagartillo was the leader of a very successful band of contrabandists. It was only his deep concern over the dogs he used which caused his death and brought about the downfall of his group.

Lagartillo was a giant of a man, respected and feared by all who knew him. He operated from a small village at the base of the Sierras called Casas Rojas. Whenever a consignment of goods was due, he would gather every able-bodied man to go into the mountains. After dark his men would slip out of their homes, one by one, walk silently down the main street and turn into a farmyard where a string of mules, heavily laden with produce, wine jars, etc. were waiting. The animals and produce were merely a blind in case the smugglers were stopped by the police.

With a guttural cry of "Ahree!" the mules were started and the contrabandists started the long trek to the French border. After two hours of steady climbing, the packs of the mules were abandoned and the climbing continued until dawn. They camped in a wild mountain gorge and ate a cold meal since they dared not light a fire. They slept all that day and in the evening Ramon, the dog-master, came. His task was to train the dogs who did the actual smuggling across the border.

Along the whole frontier between France and Spain was a series of fences twenty feet high, made of wire netting and barbed wire, and topped by a set of bells and electric signals. A pair of guards patrolled five miles of fence. They covered the entire border and each one was a dead shot.

At a given time, the dogs were let loose on the French side of the fence. They carried strapped to them, the goods to be smuggled across. They crept forward slowly until they came to the loose earth and small runways under the fence which had been prepared for them. These dogs were so clever that, no matter what happened, they never touched the netting nor rang the bells. Instead of barking, they emitted a low whine as a warning to the smugglers who were waiting for them. They avoided the guards who shot them on sight. If the leader of the dogs sensed danger, he would drop to the ground and the rest would do the same, until the whole line lay motionless.

On this dark moonless night, Lagartillo and his contrabandists lay about one hundred feet

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from the fence. There was an air of expectancy in the deep silence. Any sound would cause the men to become tense, to look around quickly and to grip their knives more tightly. Suddenly, at about ten, there was a soft rustling nearby. At a word from Ramon, a large black dog crawled towards him. The men removed his contraband, and the dog-master leashed him. He was followed by nineteen other dogs. As the last one was leashed, the men began to break camp.

Suddenly another dog came running towards them barking furiously followed by the guards. Lagartillo's first thought was for the animals, and with a cry of "Save the dogs!" he rushed towards the guards without a moment's hesitation. A furious fight followed and when the dust had cleared, Lagartillo was lying on the ground, dead. His men were captured and taken to prison. The police, after wiping out this, the most powerful band of contrabandista, were able to discourage other flagrant criminal acts from being repeated. Gradually the contrabandista faded out of the picture in Spain.

BLAME IT ON THE WEATHER

By GARY LEE HORTON

AS FANTASTIC as it may seem, there is scientific basis for the idea that weather changes bear some influence on the behavior of criminals. It was as early as the year 1835 when the French Ministry of Justice published the findings on records of crimes committed in that country from 1825 to 1830. On the basis of those figures on the geographical distribution of crime, it was concluded that crimes against persons are always more numerous in summer, that there are more crimes of personal violence occurring in the south of France than in the north.

Lombroso, Ferri, and Aschaffenberg, some of our most famous criminologists of the past, studied statistical evidence for later periods in Italy, France, and Germany. They were able to state that the continuous warmth of the southern latitudes affected people directly, heightening emotion, stimulating activity, and encouraging quarrels.

The most challenging statements on the subject were published by Edwin Grant Dexter in 1904. He found that temperature affects the emotional states which are conducive to fighting. Periods of low barometric pressure keep the police busiest, for as barometric pressure goes down, crimes of violence increase. On days when the humidity is high, though irritable, man is not prone to fight. On such days people feel like fighting but such a thing requires too much exertion. The number of crimes are also minimized by rainy weather.

Dexter's report based upon the study of forty thousand cases still stands as irrefutable evidence of the influence of weather on crime. This may in some way explain why the murder rates in Tennessee and Alabama of twenty-five and thirty per 100,000 stack up against less than two in the New England states.

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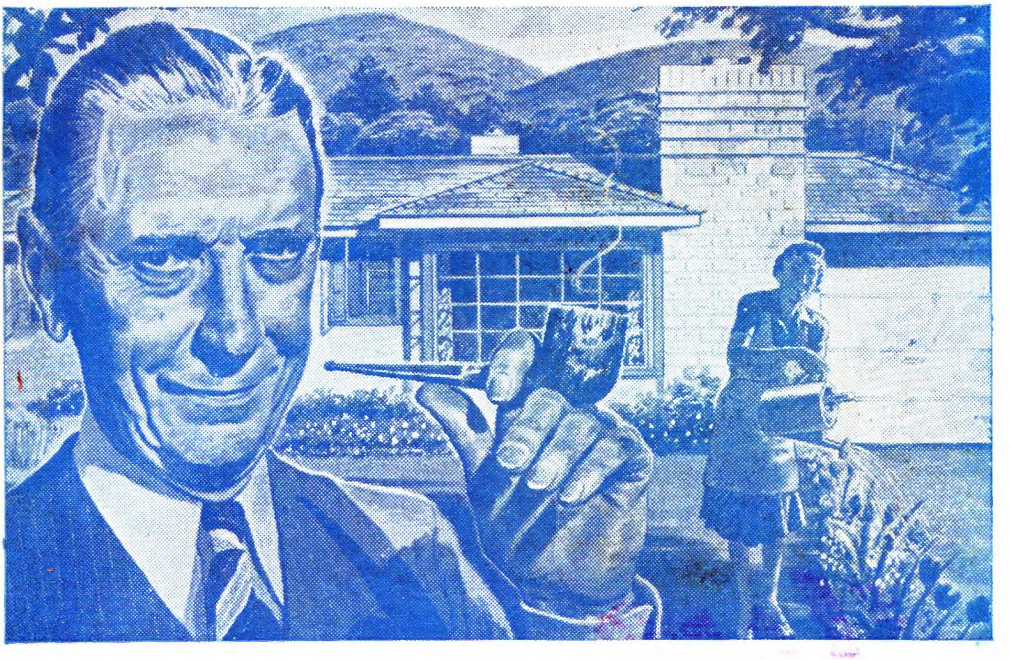

Let your HEAD take you

(The average American today has a choice of just going where "his feet take him", or choosing wisely the course to follow. Let's skip ahead 10 years, and take a look at John Jones—and listen to him . . .)

"SOMETIMES I feel so good it almost scares me.

"This house—I wouldn't swap a shingle off its roof for any other house on earth. This little valley, with the pond down in the hollow at the back, is the spot I like best in all the world.

"And they're mine. I own 'em. Nobody can take 'em away from me.

"I've got a little money coming in, regularly. Not much—but enough. And I tell you, when you can go to bed every night with nothing on your mind except the fun you're going to have tomorrow—that's as near Heaven as man gets on this earth!

"It wasn't always so.

"Back in '46—that was right after the war and sometimes the going wasn't too easy—I needed cash. Taxes were tough, and then Ellen got sick. Like almost everybody else, I was buying Bonds through the Payroll Plan—and I figured on cashing some of them in. But sick as she was, it was Ellen who talked me out of it.

"'Don't do it, John!' she said. '*Please* don't! For the first time in our lives, we're really saving money. It's *wonderful* to know that every single payday we have *more* money put aside! John, if we can only keep up this saving, think what it can mean! Maybe someday you won't have to work. Maybe we can own a home. And oh, how good it would feel to know that we need never worry about money when we're old!'

"Well, even after she got better, I stayed away from the weekly poker game—quit dropping a little cash at the hot spots now and then—gave up some of the things a man feels he has a right to. We didn't have as much fun for a while but we paid our taxes and the doctor and—we didn't touch the Bonds.

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